



UNIVERSITY
OF TASMANIA

I talked to my tree and my tree talked back: radical environmental activists and their relationships with nature

by

John Cianchi, BSc(Hons), GDip, MA
School of Social Sciences

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Tasmania November 2013

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Abstract

This thesis is about the relationship between radical environmental activists and nature. It investigates whether, for forest and whaling activists, nature is experienced as an active, as opposed to passive, participant in the construction and shaping of their identity and activism. Two research questions guide the investigation: what are radical environmental activists' perspectives and lived experiences of nature, and what identity and meaning-making processes are involved in the relational dynamics between these activists and the nature they are defending?

The concepts 'nature', 'self-identity' and 'more-than-human agency' are developed into an analytical framework to support the investigation. A phenomenological perspective guides the inquiry's focus on the research participants' lived experiences of defending nature, their changing self-identities and the ways they construct meaning about their lifeworlds.

Forest activists engaged in direct action campaigns designed to prevent clear-felling of old growth forests in Tasmania, and Sea Shepherd Conservation Society activists undertaking campaigns in the Southern Ocean to protect whales, participated in in-depth qualitative interviews. A thematic analysis was employed that aims to uncover the phenomenological themes, or experiential elements, of the participants' experiences.

The inquiry's findings contribute to environmentalism scholarship and the study of nature-human relationships. They also demonstrate the need to appreciate the role of nature as an active contributor to activist self-identity and culture.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the activists who agreed to participate in this inquiry. Their willingness to share their experiences, their candour and the trust they put in me was very humbling – it was a privilege.

Professor Rob White, my primary supervisor, inspired me to undertake this PhD journey. I am very grateful for his guidance, encouragement, patience and teaching. I am also grateful to Dr Max Travers, my secondary supervisor, whose careful reading and feedback was very helpful.

The academic and administrative staff of the School of Social Sciences were generous with their time and expertise. I am particularly grateful to Associate Professor Doug Ezzy and Dr Felicity Picken for their critical feedback about my ideas, and the encouragement they gave me throughout my inquiry. Di Heckenberg, fellow PhD candidate, gave support, feedback, encouragement and coffee.

Dr John Cameron's wise advice, during many bushwalks and conversations, was invaluable in so many ways.

A PhD might seem like a long journey for the student, but for their family it must at times seem endless. My partner Miriam and my daughters Freja, Indigo and Saffron allowed me to spend many weekends at university, rather than at home, and never complained when I went bush to ponder my research. Thank you for your belief in me.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Why do we acknowledge only our textual sources but not the ground we walk, the ever-changing skies, mountains and rivers, rocks and trees, the houses we inhabit and the tools we use, not to mention the innumerable companions, both non-human animals and fellow humans, with which and with whom we share our lives? They are constantly inspiring us, challenging us, telling us things.

Tim Ingold 2011: xii

This thesis is about the relationship between people and nature. It investigates whether, for forest and whaling activists, nature is an active, as opposed to passive, participant in the construction and shaping of their identity and activism. Tasmanian forest activists actively engaged in direct action campaigns designed to prevent clear-felling of old growth forests, and Sea Shepherd Conservation Society activists, who had just returned from an anti-whaling campaign in the Southern Ocean, participated in interviews that sought to understand their experiences of defending nature. Phenomenology guides the inquiry's focus upon the ways research participants construct meaning about their lifeworlds. The inquiry's findings contribute to scholarship about environmentalism and nature-human relationships.

Our experiences of nature can shape our self-identity and affect how we act in the world. Human societies and cultures, traditional and modern, are fashioned and constrained by their relationships with nature at both a practical level, such as the management of land, food, water resources and waste disposal, and at an abstract level, such as our conceptualisations of non-humans, wilderness, our mythologies and religions. I wrote part of this thesis while living in Kakadu National Park, in Northern Australia, where the indigenous traditional owners maintain a sophisticated culture with a continuous heritage of over 50,000 years. No other culture on earth has

been so successful. The Bininj, as the traditional owners call themselves here on the edge of Western Arnhem Land, have adapted to dramatic changes in their environment, including ice ages, global warming, land inundation, and invasion by Europeans over 200 years ago. Integral to their success is their relationship with their country. This is characterised by a conception of human identity that is intrinsically (and narratively) tied to the ecosystems they inhabit, and an active engagement with the more than human world that is experienced as possessing various forms of agency.

My inquiries into radical environmental activism on the island of Tasmania, at the other end of the continent, are encounters with people born within contemporary Western culture, who have also developed profound relationships with nature, relationships that affect their identity and action in the world. These people also experience nature as agentic at the macro (for example a mountain, ocean or landscape) and micro (for example, an individual tree or animal) levels. They develop deeply moral relationships with the nature they are defending, which appear to have led to them to engage, often at considerable personal cost, in campaigns to defend Tasmanian old-growth forests from clear-felling, and protect whales from Japanese hunters in the Southern Ocean.

Environment has proved a difficult theme for sociology to embrace (Murdoch 2001; Walker 2005: 78). Sociology has struggled to incorporate the environment into its purview beyond a greening of traditional sociological theories, within a paradigm that emphasises human separation from nature (Stevens 2012). The contribution of the physical environment to human action has long been acknowledged within sociology (for example, Weber wrote that when imbued with subjective meaning, non-human phenomena may be recognised “as elements within social action” (Giddens 1971: 147)), but humans are conceived as separate from the world and the non-humans that inhabit it; the material world has meaning to the extent

that it is imbued with socio-cultural ideas. The constituents of nature are “passive participants in this great human drama” (Lockie 2004: 26).

While environmental sociology has been recognised as a legitimate branch of sociology since the late 1970s (Catton and Dunlap 1978), thirty years on, “societal-environmental interactions remain the most challenging issue, and divergent approaches to them the source of our most fundamental cleavages” (Dunlap 2010: 15). In 1978 Catton and Dunlap argued that sociology is restricted to an anthropocentric paradigm (what they called a human exceptionalism paradigm), which makes it difficult for sociologists “to deal meaningfully with the social implications of ecological problems and constraints” (1978: 42). Environmental sociology, they argued, should operate within a non-anthropocentric paradigm that recognises the human species “among the many that are interdependently involved in the biotic communities that shape social life” (1978: 45).

The present inquiry is situated within the discipline of sociology. It is also cross-disciplinary in the sense that it draws many ideas from other literatures, especially philosophy, geography, eco-psychology and anthropology. It is undertaken from the standpoint that humans are thoroughly and inextricably entangled in their life-world, a world that is in a constant process of creative unfolding, and in which meaning making is a product of humans’ entanglement. It challenges, therefore, purely constructionist sociological explanations of human culture that reject the role of the ‘real’ in meaning making.

There are three motivations that underpin the research. First, I have a genuine interest in the people who have made the decision to engage in radical, or direct action, environmental campaigning. When I began my doctoral research I learned that there is a paucity of scholarship about contemporary radical environmental activism, compared with accounts of the radical environmental campaigns of the previous century. Activists are

an interesting research subject because they engage in lifestyles that defy normative expectations and which are unconventional, challenging and risky. They are willing to undertake what for most of us would be an unacceptable level of discomfort, danger and confrontation. In spite of police and court actions and their generally negative portrayal in the media, they maintain a passionate commitment to their environmental goals.

Forests activists in particular are frequently disparaged by their opponents, the state, media and general public as anti-social, eco-terrorists, scum and 'ferals', and as people who are damaging other people's legitimate livelihoods. The whaling activists who are members of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, while using similar and even riskier tactics, enjoy a romantic image in the popular imagination. I have been struck frequently in my encounters with the activists, how conscientiously and thoughtfully many of these people approach their activism. They seem to express an extraordinary commitment to non-human nature. This is something worthy of sociological research at a time when nature (and humanity) is under threat from the challenges presented by anthropogenic climate change, destruction of biodiversity, pollution and overpopulation.

Radical environmental activists are an outlier on the continuum of political and social responses to environmental harm. My background prior to undertaking this PhD has largely involved working with people who are engaged in projects of social and self-change. This has been as an outdoor educator, youth-worker, counsellor, probation and parole officer and in policy and management roles within the public service. I have always been interested in people who experience the world differently to the orthodox culture, because I have generally found that they have much to teach me.

The second motivation behind this inquiry is a conviction that sociology has not taken into account sufficiently the phenomenological experience of nature as an actor, something I have engaged with previously as an outdoor

educator and in my own journeying in the outdoors. I realised that this inquiry would be an opportunity to test empirically the usefulness of the concept of nature as a form of actor in sociological research.

The third motivation is to find out whether the kinds of relationships and experiences that radical environmentalists have in nature might contribute to learning about the kinds of social changes required to respond effectively to climate change. I am interested in how experiences of nature affect the way people conceptualise and relate to it. I wanted to undertake research that could have findings applicable beyond the research subjects. I wondered if learning about the experiences of radical activists might be applied to the creation of policies and programs that can contribute to a shift in social attitudes towards nature that is conducive to an effective response to anthropogenic environmental harms.

ORGANISATION OF THIS THESIS

The thesis is divided into three parts. Part 1 establishes the enquiry and develops a conceptual framework to guide the research. My concern here is to provide an account of the landscape through which this inquiry travels. The part opens in Chapter 2, which explores the literature about radical environmentalism, establishes the scope of the inquiry and describes the two activist groups that are its subject. There is little sociological literature about the relationships that radical activists form with the nature they are defending, yet my experiences of nature (which I discuss in the following section of this introductory chapter) suggest that this might be a significant factor in initiating and sustaining radical environmentalism. This gives rise to the inquiry's two research questions, one relating to activists' lived experiences of nature, and the other dealing with the identity and meaning processes arising from their engagement with the nature they are defending. Two activist groups are selected as research subjects; forest activists in Tasmania (where I live) and Sea Shepherd activists who visit

Tasmania upon on their passage to and from campaigns in the Southern Ocean.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the development of a conceptual framework that will assist me to shed light on the research questions, design the research and undertake the analysis. The challenge set by the research question is to inquire into the role of nature (in particular the nature being defended) in activist self-identity and action. Three concepts are chosen to guide the inquiry. The first is **nature**. At face value nature seems an obvious and easy concept to define. It is, however, a conceptual container that is asked to do a lot. Care is taken, therefore, to establish a definition that meets the challenges set by the research question. Environmentalism can be understood as a contest of ideas about the meaning of nature, but of course nature denotes more than culturally derived meanings, and represents the organic and inorganic constituents of our planet. The meaning of nature, as it is used in this inquiry, resides in this collaboration between the imaginative and the physical. This understanding of nature as a relational and cultural achievement affects the rest of the inquiry.

The inquiry sets out on its journey with the proposition that the participants are affected by their experiences of nature. **Self-identity**, as a product of autobiographical narration and rationalisation, becomes the gauge with which to measure, as it were, nature's capacity to act upon the human subject. The concept of a fluid self-identity, shaped and reshaped by narrative, informs the choice of data collection. This inquiry asks participants for stories about their interactions with, and experiences of, nature.

Finally a concept is developed that I call **more-than-human agency**. This concept is asked to represent human's experiences of nature as an actor. The suggestion that the non-human can express agency, in its interactions with humans at least, is familiar to environmental philosophers,

anthropologists and human geographers. But it is a concept that seems to unsettle sociologists, myself included. Care is taken, therefore, to develop a concept that is just that, a concept, one that I define in the hope that it will assist with my inquiry. I do not argue in this thesis for the existence of more-than-human agency, in the sociological sense of conscious intent or willful volition on the part of the non-human, because that is outside the scope of this inquiry.

Why, if it is so contentious, do I use it at all? I argue that its absence in other research about environmentalism is why nature remains a passive, or non-active, element of that research. More-than-human agency is, therefore, a concept used in data collection and analysis to explore the participants' experiences and meaning making. It also becomes, in this thesis, a research subject; this inquiry is also a test of its usefulness in sociological inquiry.

Part 2 is concerned with the establishment of a qualitative methodological framework and an account of the research journey. In Chapter 4 I develop the inquiry's methodological framework using Crotty's 'research string' (1998: 5) as a guide. To this end I explore the relationship between epistemology, and in particular an epistemology that is open to more-than-human agency, and method. I have endeavoured to undertake this research within the interpretive sociology tradition and locate phenomenology and narrative inquiry as key guides.

Chapter 5 is an account of the research methods and research experience. I experienced many challenges developing and implementing the research methods. I was particularly conscious of the ethical demands of conducting phenomenological and narrative research, and this becomes a major theme of the chapter. The central method is the narrative interview. Research participants were asked to tell stories about their experiences, in particular their encounters with the nature they were defending. The story becomes a

medium to pass on expert knowledge as “a way of guiding the attention of listeners or readers into” the world (Ingold 2000: 190) and to develop the dialectic between nature and self-identity.

The research journey departs the known and heads into the unknown in Chapter 6, which describes the interview experience. This chapter is transitional and provides a contextual link between the previous chapters and the data presentation. I describe my encounters with the Sea Shepherd Society and forest participants. Then, in the spirit of phenomenological inquiry, I describe my experience of undertaking an interview in a tree-sit. Some reflections are made about the significance of the activist community in meaning making, introducing the participant’s voices for the first time.

The data transcription and analysis, including the theoretical implications of the choices I make in this important stage of the research are the subject of Chapter 7. A research participant’s voice is introduced to illustrate how interview transcripts will be interpreted.

Part 3 presents and interprets the interview data. It begins with Chapter 8 which explores the participants’ journeys into activism. The following four chapters present themes that analyse the participants’ encounters with the nature they were defending.

The final chapter, Chapter 13, reviews the research findings and presents a tentative model that uses the conceptual framework to explore how the participants’ lived experience of defending nature affects their conceptualisation of nature, self-identity and action in the world. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the inquiry’s implications for policies and programs beyond the activist communities.

SITUATING MYSELF WITHIN THE INQUIRY

This inquiry is not a piece of research in which the researcher attempts to isolate himself or herself from the phenomena under investigation. I recognise that my life experience, research interests and experiences of nature are implicated in this inquiry's question, design and interpretation. This does not mean that the inquiry is undertaken with scant regard to objectivity and rigour. It does mean, however, that I am obliged to advise the reader about the values I bring to the research (Denzin 2001: 43). This section provides a personal introduction to the thesis as a preface to the technical introduction which will follow.

I first encountered the Tasmanian forest activists on my way home from a bushwalk to Mt Anne in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. My bushwalking companion and I dropped into 'Camp Floz', a protest camp in the Florentine forests, that was protesting the clear-felling of old growth forests (see Chapter 6 for a description). I had just completed a survey of eco-sabotage/eco-terrorism, for a green criminology unit I was undertaking as part of my MA, and the visit sparked an interest in learning more about radical environmentalists. My PhD proposal was accepted and I began this inquiry.

When I began I was interested in learning about what radical environmentalists do and how they communicated with other activist groups. But I quickly realised that I was more interested in aspects of why they do it and the meaning making that takes place while defending nature. In my readings about environmentalism I developed a nagging feeling that something was missing. I realised that this was to do with the treatment of the non-human nature that was being defended. I concluded that in much of my reading non-human nature generally appears as a homogenous and passive identity and as the physical space in which protest is played out. I want to explain why I think nature might be an active participant in the

lived experience of environmental activism with three brief stories about my own engagement with non-human nature.

Flying with vultures

My first story is set in Nepal during a paragliding trip. Paragliding involves the use of a wing that looks much like a parachute. It is laid out on the ground, usually high on a hillside or ridge, and inflated by raising it into the oncoming wind, or in still conditions by running down the hill, and taking off. When inflated the wing enables the pilot to fly considerable distances, using rising air above ridgelines or thermals.

My launch is a steep slope next to the road at the top of the Sarangkot ridge approximately 150km West of Kathmandu. I am ready to launch. My paraglider is laid out behind me and I am facing out over the valley looking for signs that a thermal is on its way. Below me are terraced rice paddies, the town and Phewa lake. Behind me, on the other side of the ridge, Machapuchare and the Annapurna massif tower above me.

It is the first time I have flown here and I am quite nervous. The launch site is clean, steep and with a reasonable space in which to inflate my wing and launch into the air. But if I stuff it up, I will crash into the trees that are either side of and below the launch. To my right is a narrow spur that provides a trigger and pathway for thermals, spinning columns of air, which, when they are large enough, detach from the ground and start rising, following the spur and continuing up into the sky. They are like an upside down version of drops of water collecting in the roof of a cave and running down stalactites and ridges until they are large enough to be released from the roof and fall towards the ground. What I want to do is launch into one of these thermals and use it to climb above the ridge and then head along the valley, flying from one thermal to the next.

Suddenly, the leaves in the trees below launch start moving, gently at first and then with more urgency. I can hear the wind blowing more strongly. I can feel the warm air on my face. Its smell is warm, redolent of earth, leaves and grass. Small birds chase insects caught in the updraft, another useful indicator that the thermal may be strong enough for me to use. When the wind is strong enough I turn around to face my wing, pull it into the air, turn round again, look up to check that the wing is inflated fully, push forward and run down the hillside. In a few steps my feet stop pushing on the ground: I am flying. I relax back into my seat, check my wing again and concentrate on staying in the thermal.

To the paraglider pilot air feels more solid than gaseous. Thermals have boundaries and as I enter the core it tries to push me out. I have to pull strongly on my left control line to steer back into the column and then, with that wing tip dug in, begin circling and ascending. The feeling is exhilarating. I can feel the pull of the thermal and the lurches in my stomach tell me I am rising quickly. I concentrate furiously on attuning myself to the thermal's character, shape and behaviour, adjusting the control lines and my leg positions, leaning into the turn.

As I circle above the ridge I notice several Himalayan Griffon Vultures launch from some trees and glide towards me. I am both nervous and tremendously excited by this. These birds have three metre wingspans and if they felt threatened and attacked me they could easily shred my wing with their sharp talons and beaks. In Australia I have often flown with wedge-tailed eagles and white-bellied sea-eagles. They have occasionally been aggressive but are not nearly as daunting as these huge birds, flying as effortlessly and powerfully as they do, their deep set, expressionless eyes seeming to reach into me.

Wings outstretched, the vultures enter the thermal and start circling a few hundred feet below me. It does not take them long to join me, circling

upwards in the same direction that I am (circling in the same direction is an important part of vulture thermalling etiquette I learn). We circle together for a few minutes before they outfly me and continue up towards the top of the thermal, where a small cumulus cloud is already forming where it hits the temperature inversion.

So what happened here and why am I telling you this story? There are two reasons. First my experience of the environment and nature is embodied. The way I as a human being perceive, experience and interpret nature is through my senses (and I could describe several other ways in which the paraglider pilot does this) in combination with my cognitive faculties. And this sensorial appreciation also has spatial and temporal dimensions (Macnaghten and Urry 1998). My experiences of paragliding, however, suggest strongly to me that much of my engagement with nature is occurring prior to, and frequently, in the absence of conscious cognition; my body often seems to do the work independently of my consciousness awareness. Second, it is not possible for me in that moment, or now, to provide a completely objective explanation for the interaction that I experienced with the vultures. Did they fly with me because they were interested in me? Or, were they simply using me instrumentally as an additional source of information about the thermal? Did the vultures communicate with me and fly companionably, did they accord me status as a person/bird, as something real or unreal? Of course I do not know the answers to these questions, and for now I want to emphasise that what is important is not whether it is possible to observe or define an objectively real interaction between human and nature, but *how* I as a human being experience and interpret nature. Because this is what affects how I construct meanings about my world.

Meeting an ermine

My second story took place during a 12 day walk across Baffin Island in the Canadian arctic. One afternoon, I stopped for rest by some small boulders on a hillside above the Owl Valley. The Owl Valley, which my companions and I had been walking along for three days, is a long, U-shaped valley left behind by what must have been an enormous glacier. Its broad valley floor is carpeted with tundra and countless ponds and puddles, inhabited by various freshwater birds taking advantage of the short but productive summer to breed. The valley, despite its size, feels enclosed and claustrophobic because it is walled by impenetrable granite cliffs that line its sides like castle ramparts, punctuated every few kilometres by a hanging glacier that has escaped from the Penny Ice Cap. Waterfalls tumble down the sides and a river, surging with the midday snowmelt, zigzags its way along the valley.

I have climbed the hillside to get a view of the ice cap and a glacier opposite me that has bulldozed its way down to the Akshayuk Pass. I hear a high pitched squeaking coming from near my feet and look down to see an ermine looking up at me. This small stoat, about the diameter of a champagne cork and 15 centimetres or so long, darts in and out of a network of small tunnels among the boulders. The ermine appears from a hole, stands tall on its front legs, starts squeaking and then darts back into the tunnel, a flash of brown and cream, before reappearing out of another tunnel a few moments later.

We spent about ten minutes observing each other. It was an extraordinary encounter and I was very moved by this animal that seemed so curious about me and quite fearless. I was in a vast landscape, in a place that possibly had not been visited by humans in the lifetime of this ermine. I had spent the last few days working hard in gnarly weather, worried about being predated upon by polar bears and with the very real sense that in this

landscape I was of no consequence whatsoever (except perhaps to a bear), yet this small, fierce expression of vitality seemed to want to interact. The ermine seemed to be actively engaged in sensing and communicating with me. I found the experience quite affecting, all the more so because it happened in a place that seemed so remote and unattainable and with an animal that, despite its small size, appeared so in command of its world, so completely engaged in what it was doing.

While I do not wish to anthropomorphise this animal or attribute to it things it did not have, and I certainly do not want to romanticise it, it seemed that the ermine was keen to work out what I was and to engage with me. Edward Abbey (1990: 21) wrote, reflecting on the same issue,

how can I descend to such anthropomorphism? Easily – but is it, in this case, entirely false? Perhaps not. I am not attributing human motives to my snake and bird acquaintances. I recognise that when and where they serve purposes of mine they do so for beautifully selfish reasons of their own. ... I suggest, however, that it's a foolish, simple-minded rationalism which denies any form of emotion to all animals but man and his dog.

It is experiences such as this, occasions when my preoccupations with what I am thinking are obliterated by an encounter with an other, which remind me that it is not just in other humans that we can recognise or experience vitality, sentience and agency. I wonder if this is what Abram calls our 'indigenous soul', a deep seated "yearning for engagement with a more-than-human otherness" (Abram 2010: 277), which represents a way of participating in the life of the world that is a product of human evolution.

Encountering a tree

My last story is set in Southwestern Tasmania, in the first six months of my PhD, when I spent nine days walking alone from Lake Pedder to Recherche Bay. This was an opportunity for me to observe the kinds of changes that take place during extended periods in the bush and came at a time when I wanted to think about concepts such as modern human's separation from nature and the possibilities and implications of interactions with non-human nature. While, of course I was missing my family and comforts such as a decent cup of coffee, the overwhelming emotional state that I developed during the nine days was one of gratitude and goodwill towards the landscape and the rocks, animals and plants that inhabited it. I am not suggesting that I had any sense that this landscape, or nature, had any interest with me, or was necessarily actively interacting with me but I developed a strong feeling of participation and interaction.

On my fifth afternoon I set up camp beside the Louisa River in a lovely eucalyptus and beech forest. I pitched my tent below an enormous, dead-topped gum tree. By enormous I mean that it must have been at least four metres in diameter. At its base was a large, circular burl (or growth) covered with rough bark. As I sat below this tree, making my dinner, I reflected upon its age and its significance to this place. It dawned on me that this was just the kind of place that might have received attention from people from a different culture than mine, from the Needwonnee people who dwelled here for thousands of years prior to European invasion. Certainly, I thought, if this was India or Nepal, or an old culture in Europe where shrines are often built in nature, it would have been recognised as a special tree with special values.

This feeling, which for me was akin to recognition, combined with my general sense of admiration and gratitude for the landscape through which I was travelling, inspired me to place an offering of flowers on a small rock

below the burl, before I left to climb over the Ironbound Range. At that time this felt a completely rational and natural thing to do. Writing this story now, I find it difficult to relate it, without it seeming trite and narcissistic, and the telling fails to communicate how such an unusual experience could seem natural.

This story describes an encounter with non-animal nature and the formation of a sense of relationship with living objects, such as trees, that are not regarded as sentient (although see Marder 2013). Catherine Laudine, describing Australian Indigenous relationships with the land writes, “The land is understood to have its own consciousness and it is understood to need a personal and ongoing relationship with the humans who live there” (2009: 47). I am reminded of Edward O. Wilson’s development of the concept of biophilia, which argues humans have a biologically based inclination to seek connections with living things and that “to the degree that we come to understand other organisms, we will place greater value on them, and on ourselves” (1984: 2). The main point of this story, however, is to illustrate that spending time in or with nature, particularly time spent purposively and attentively, can affect our conception of and relationship with it.

Reconfiguring self and nature

What I am describing is not the product of a romantic impulse (although I recognise that as part of my attraction to wild places), or using nature “as a free clinic for admirers of their own sensitivity” (Fowles 1996). I have experienced often enough, through many journeys in mountains and wild places, nature’s indifference and danger. As Ezzy writes,

not only does nature provide places of solitude, of worship, of great peace, grandeur and awe, but nature is dangerous, even terrifying. But more than this, nature also reminds us of our mortality, it

reminds us that we are not in complete control, that the future is uncertain and that we are not alone (2004: 30-1).

What I am suggesting in these stories is that nature is encountered phenomenologically as animate, dynamic, and continually changing as we move through it (Abram 2010: 268). I am also suggesting that our experiences of nature are bound in relationships with them.

My journeying in the mountains and my work as an adventure-based counselor have taught me that one can discover an authentic-feeling self in nature. The kinds of experiences of the non-human world that I am describing affect who I think I am, who I could become and how I act in the world. To be in such places anchors me; they contribute to my sense of identity. They also shape my sense of humanity's ideal place in nature. My encounters with nature, particularly in non-rural settings, suggest that in order to fully understand who I am, I must somehow reject modernity's desire to place humanity above nature and situate myself within it. A consequence of this reconfiguration of my relationship with nature is a feeling of obligation towards it.

These three stories illustrate where I stood at the outset of this research journey. They describe ways that I have experienced non-human nature and suggest a way of theorising the relationships between experiences of nature, self-identity and social-action, in which self and nature are in a continual process of reconfiguration.

Talking to the activists at the Floz that afternoon in 2009, I was struck by the determination they expressed to defend the coupe from the loggers. It was sunny and warm, but I knew from previous visits that the forest here could be cold, wet and windy; it is rainforest after all. I wondered what happened to people when they visited such places that could give them

such determination to overcome the discomfort and risks of the radical activist lifestyle.

In the next chapter a brief survey of environmentalism and social movement research will be provided, followed by a description of the two environmental groups whose members are the subject of this research. At the chapter's end, my musings about the activists I met at Camp Floz will be translated into the research questions that guide this inquiry.

Part 1: Establishing the inquiry

Chapter 2 Radical environmentalism: but what is nature doing?

If wilderness is outlawed, only outlaws can save wilderness.

Edward Abbey 1991: 85

The wellsprings of a green commitment – at both the activist and more passive levels of identification – are not, in the first instance, theoretical; nor even intellectual. They are, rather, pre-rational.

Peter Hay 2002: 2

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a brief survey of radical environmentalism. First it defines radical environmentalism and then describes radical environmentalism's emergence, especially in Australia. There is not space here to provide a comprehensive introduction to radical environmentalism, or its place within the history of environmental thought and politics (see Hay, 2002; Doyle 2000; Lines 2006; Buckman 2008; Scarce 2006, Manes 1990; Lee 1995). Two related discourses dominate the literature, environmental identification and defence. But nature seems to be missing from studies about environmentalism. This gives rise to the inquiry's research questions. The chapter closes with a description of the forest and whaling activist networks, whose members are the subject of this inquiry.

Radical environmental activism is a distinct form of environmental politics that emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In Australia and other countries with large wilderness areas, such as the United States and Canada, it is historically grounded in the perceived failure of mainstream environmentalism to preserve wilderness and the emergence of eco-philosophies, such as deep ecology and ecofeminism, as both philosophical

and political discourses. In the United Kingdom and Europe radical environmentalism has a less biocentric perspective and is guided by earlier protest movements that preceded it such as anti-nuclear disarmament (Doherty et al 2007: 806; Rootes 2003; Hay 2002: 4). Radical protests emerged first in the United States out of frustration with the perceived bureaucratising of mainstream environmental organisations such as the Sierra Club and Greenpeace, which began to adopt lobbying methods and policies that were more conservative and acceptable to government and industry, and their failure to achieve environmental goals (Doherty 1999: 278; Brulle 2000: 198; Carter 2007: 155). Earth First!, one of the first activist networks to explicitly adopt direct action, puts it thus:

are you tired of namby-pamby environmental groups? Are you tired of overpaid corporate environmentalists who suck up to bureaucrats and industry? Have you become disempowered by the reductionist approach of environmental professionals and scientists? (Earth First! nd).

RADICAL ENVIRONMENTALISM

Radical environmentalists are defined in this inquiry as people who are willing to use direct action tactics to obstruct and prevent state-sanctioned activities that they perceive as environmentally harmful. Radical is used to describe the extreme nature of the activist's protests, compared with conventional political campaigning, rather than the political goals or ideologies that are adopted (Vanderheiden 2008: 302), although some organisations or networks may also be radical in this sense. Direct action refers to a repertoire of campaigning strategies that are usually employed when conventional political pathways to prevent environmental goals have been exhausted (Doyle 2000: 44). Strategies range from conventional forms of civil-disobedience such as sit-ins and human barricades, to forms of sometimes violent protest that may involve law-breaking and damaging

property. A diverse range of tactics are used by radical activists to obstruct and hinder the contested activities. A key tactic that characterises contemporary radical direct actions is the use of media friendly incidents that manufacture activist vulnerability (Doherty 1999). This involves creating situations where activist safety is placed in the hands of the antagonist or law enforcement agency. Examples include sitting in tripods across logging roads, tree-sits, tunnels, 'locking on' to machinery, or placing anti-whaling protestors in small boats in the path of whaling ships.

It is helpful to think of radical environmental activist organisations and networks such as Earth First! or the Sea Shepherd Society as being at one end of a continuum of activist tactics, with the other end being conservative environmental organisations that eschew direct action and use conventional social and political processes to achieve environmental goals (for example, the World Wildlife Fund and the Australian Conservation Foundation). In the middle are organisations such as Greenpeace and the Wilderness Society that have increasingly used conventional processes but retain direct action within their tactical repertoire (Table 2.1). Using this system, the activists I encountered at Camp Floz would fit the appellation 'radical' because they engage in direct actions that unlawfully obstruct logging operations. This is not to suggest that these people do not also engage in more conventional tactics, but their presence at the camp demonstrates an identification with radical environmentalism.

Radical environmental groups are generally grassroots organisations that are committed to participatory forms of decision making and are strongly anti-institutional (Doyle 2000: 45; Carter 2007: 155-6). For example, Earth First!, one of the first networks to promote radical direct action, eschews formal organisational structure or leadership, describing itself as a movement (Earth First! nd). The Sea Shepherd Society is unusual because it is a highly organised organisation. It combines grassroots activities with a

formal structure, including a board of management, advisory boards and hierarchical leadership.

Tactical repertoires are used to define radical environmentalists (and their fidelity to the law), rather than other characteristics, because the organisation or network's repertoire is an expression of how it conceptualises the environmental problem it is targeting, and the best ways to achieve its goals. It expresses how the organisation perceives its role within the broader environmental movement and within society (see White 2013: 130-135). Other characteristics, such as membership, organisational structure, decision-making processes, budget and history do not achieve this.

Table 2.1 Environmental activism and tactical repertoires

| <i>continuum</i> | <i>tactical repertoire</i> | <i>example</i> |
|------------------|---|---|
| conservative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> conventional activism: lobbying, legal action, cyber-activism, education, research rejects civil disobedience, strong fidelity to legal system | World Wildlife Fund Al Gore Climate Project Australian Conservation Fdn |
| mainstream | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> conventional activism & non-violent direct actions: civil disobedience, witnessing blurred boundaries with conservative & radical | Greenpeace The Wilderness Society |
| radical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> rejects conventional tactics as ineffective direct actions: trespass, obstruction, sabotage weak fidelity to legal system | Earth First! Sea Shepherd Society Still Wild Still Threatened |

A BRIEF HISTORY OF RADICAL ENVIRONMENTALISM

Radical environmentalism first appeared in the United States in the early 1980s. It arose out of frustration at the failures of conventional activism to achieve environmental goals and the perception that mainstream environmental organisations were becoming routinised into conventional politics, and consequently losing their potency and grassroots character. Several frustrated activists decided to form Earth First!, a new group that

would engage in a more radical style of direct action to frustrate industry and make conservative environmental organisations “much more attractive and worthy of serious negotiation” (Foreman and Haywood 1993). What was different about the protest actions was their willingness to engage in law breaking, including at its most extreme, acts of sabotage or ‘monkey wrenching’ (Scarce 2006: 5). Monkey wrenching, also known as ecotage and ecosabotage, is associated with the American environmentalist and writer Edward Abbey after his novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (Abbey 1976), which describes the sabotage of forestry and mining operations in Utah and Arizona, in an effort to stymie what the book’s four protagonists decided was unacceptable damage to the natural environment. Earth First! describes it as:

Ecotage, ecodefense, billboard bandits, desurveying, road reclamation, tree spiking, even fire. All of these terms describe the unlawful sabotage of industrial extraction and development equipment, as a means of striking at the Earth's destroyers where they commit their crimes and hitting them where they feel it most—in their profit margins. Monkeywrenching is a step beyond civil disobedience. It is nonviolent, aimed only at inanimate objects. It is one of the last steps in defense of the wild, a deliberate action taken by an Earth defender when almost all other measures have failed (Earth First! nd).

Monkey wrenching is a strategy deployed by radical environmentalists as one of several forms or tactics of protest (Scarce 2006: 10-11) that represent different levels of illegality and potentially harmful behaviour. For example, a protestor might sit in a tree (as a form of civil disobedience), operate a blog (a conventional, legal form of cyberactivism) and engage in spiking trees (inserting a metal or ceramic spike that reduces the trees’ value but does not harm them) and damaging earthmoving equipment (sabotaging

property). The US Federal Bureau of Intelligence described monkey-wrenching, which it calls 'eco-terrorism', in 2005 as "one of today's most serious domestic terrorism threats," citing over 1200 criminal incidents between 1990 and 2004 (Lewis 2005).

Radical environmental networks such as Earth First! have inspired similar networks in other countries, including Australia (Doyle 2000: 39). They share ideas, tactics and strategies. For example, Foreman and Haywood (2002), both prominent advocates of direct action and monkey wrenching produced a guide that covered things such as disabling machinery, tree-spiking and avoiding detection. Social media also provide a means to share videos and ideas internationally. The internet also becomes another platform to disrupt and sabotage protagonists' activities through cyberactivism (Jensen 2006).

Earth First! and similar organisations such as the Animal Liberation Front and Earth Liberation Front were involved in a number of direct actions and covert sabotage during the 1980s and 1990s. It is an approach that spread internationally and groups were established in the United Kingdom focussing upon trees and motorways, and in Australia, focussing upon wilderness destruction and fossil fuel industries.

In Australia there has been less focus by activists on tactics that involve the destruction of property, with most campaigns focusing upon hindering forestry and coalmining operations through non-violent direct action. Tree-spiking has been rejected by direct action groups in Tasmania, although as recently as 2009 Captain Paul Watson from the Sea Shepherd Society recommended it be used to protect the Florentine (Stedman 2009). This has not stopped pro-industry stakeholders from alleging it in an effort to discredit environmentalists. For example, in 1995 the Victorian Police became aware of plans by "pro-logging interests" to damage forestry machinery (The Wilderness Society 2003). And in 2012 the Tasmanian

Premier Lara Giddings claimed that tree spikes had been found in trees, during a visit to Ta Ann's Huon Valley mill, a claim she was later forced to withdraw because of lack of evidence (Bolger 2012).

Undertaking research into radical activist groups has proven difficult. Activist organisations, described as "introspective organisations" by Doyle (2000: 42), are often short-lived and operate without formal structures or organisations at an underground level "to confuse opposition, and to remain invisible to its enemies" (Doyle 2000: 43). Scarce observes that a defining characteristic of radical environmentalists is that they often work alone or in small groups and reject organisational hierarchies (Scarce 2006: 5). Within the period of this inquiry, direct action forest activism seemed to operate under a variety of organisational banners, including the Huon Environment Centre, Still Wild Still Threatened, and Code Green, within which membership and leadership seemed fluid and at times difficult to identify.

ECOLOGICAL IDENTIFICATION AND DEFENCE

Two related discourses frame accounts and explanations of radical environmentalism: ecological identification and defence. Scarce writes that the motivation of most activists, or eco-warriors as he describes them, to become activists is emotionally driven, borne of an 'ecological consciousness', and "activist after activist, when asked to consider the events, ideas, and inspirations which led them to adopt their uncommon principles, acknowledge that it is intuition which spurs them to act, not some clear, rational, deductive thought process" (2006: 31).

Radical environmentalists, Scarce argues, are intent upon bridging a perceived divide between humans and nature, a divide which he blames on Judeo-Christianity, and which is the cause of the ecological crisis facing the planet (Scarce 2006: 7-10). His finding coincides with Hay's (Hay 2002: 2)

that “most people come to a position of green identification *in the first instance* via some trigger or impulse” and will then rationalise or seek to understand their position through a theoretical or intellectual system such as deep ecology. There is not room to provide a description of deep ecology and its relationship to the environmental movement (see Devall and Sessions 1985; Fox 1990; Drengson and Inoue 1995; Hay 2002). However, it is noted that Deep Ecology is a significant explanatory and guiding eco-philosophy that was particularly influential for environmental activism at the end of the 20th century (and interestingly only two research participants referred to the philosophy in the present inquiry).

I have been struck reading accounts of radical environmentalism how often witnessing animal pain and responding empathically seems to serve as such a trigger. For example, Krien describes how Vica Bayley, currently the Director of the Wilderness Society Tasmania, grew up on a farm where shooting wildlife was normal. Returning to Tasmania after a year away he went spotlighting with a friend. The wallaby he shot “made a sound before falling over. I remember looking at my mate and saying, “I can’t do this.” (Krien 2010: 233). Krien reports another environmentalist who tells her about a similar experience, that exactly matches my own when I was a teenager. The man shot and wounded a rabbit. “It just started shrieking. I didn’t even know rabbits could make a sound, but this one was just screaming ... I couldn’t shoot anything after that” (Krien 2010: 233).

While he was obviously already deeply committed to conservation, Paul Watson, who runs the Sea Shepherd Society, describes how he dedicated his life to defending whales from human predation in 1975 during a direct action in a Zodiac outboard dinghy:

the whalers fired a harpoon over our heads and hit a female in the head. She screamed. There was a fountain of blood. She made a sound like a woman’s scream. Just then one of the largest males I’ve

ever seen slapped his tail hard against the water and hurled himself right at the Soviet vessel. Just before he could strike, the whalers harpooned him too. He fell back and swam right at us. He reared out of the water. I thought, this is it, it's all over, he's going to slam down on the boat. But instead, he pulled back. I saw his muscles pull back. It was as if he knew we were trying to save them. As he slid back into the water, drowning in his own blood, I looked into his eye and saw recognition. Empathy. What I saw in his eye as he looked at me would change my life forever. He saved my life and I would return the favour (Heller 2007: 6).

For others, the development of an environmentalist commitment may arise through witnessing the destruction of landscape, rather than animals. John Cameron describes such a moment when, as a geologist in the Rocky Mountains in Montana, he watches a favourite lunchtime spot bulldozed as a track is built for a drilling rig:

I was distraught, feeling that I had betrayed the mountain country that I had come to know so intimately. I recognised that I could no longer hold two discordant impulses with myself – tremendous intellectual excitement of the quest for gold and silver, and love of the Rocky Mountains the way they were. The resulting decision to leave a career in geology and turn towards environmental studies is still echoing through my life today (Cameron 2003: 58).

For some people at least, an identification with nature can lead to adopting direct action as a form of defence of nature. Luers, a self-described eco-warrior currently serving a ten year prison sentence (reduced on appeal from 23 years) for the destruction of three four-wheel drives, seemed to feel that he had no choice but to “defend” a forest in Oregon under a banner of “if trees fall, blood spills” and do so “by any means necessary” (Luers 2004). Jensen (2006), an articulate advocate of direct action, argues that there is no

other choice but to defend the natural environment in any way possible, including the employment of violent tactics. Defence of nature may also be rationalised as an expression of self-defence if the activists identify themselves as part of that nature (Taylor 2010: 80), and a research participant in this inquiry described himself as “one of nature’s antibodies”. This echoes Australian activist and deep ecologist John Seed’s expression of his own motivation to prevent rainforest destruction: “I was no longer John Seed protecting the rainforest. I was the rainforest protecting herself through this little piece of the humanity I cradled into existence” (Seed 2006: 101).

Defence of wilderness against developers, loggers and industry gives rise to war-like language and actions. Activists engage in military style campaigns to defend nature (Scarce 2006: 13). Buckman’s 2008 history of environmentalism in Tasmania is an account of battles waged between environmentalists and resource developers. The image of the eco-warrior also pervades the literature and popular imagination. For example, Peter Heller’s *The whale warriors* (2007) and Rick Scarce’s *Eco-warriors* (2006) employ the use of the warrior metaphor to describe the David and Goliath fight between activist and state or corporation over nature, and the tactics required. Lines (2006) extends this metaphor, describing the history of Australian environmentalism, as one in which environmentalists are patriotically engaged in a battle to create a new Australian identity that values its natural environment.

Identity has been used as an analytical lens in several other explorations of environmentalism (see Clayton and Opatow 2003). Within Australia Burgmann (2003) emphasises the role of class politics and identity in environmentalism’s struggles against capitalism and globalisation’s exploitation of nature. The trade union led ‘green bans’ in the 1970s, and contemporary campaigns against environmental exploitation by

multinationals, would seem to be consistent with Burgman's Marxist analysis. Within Tasmania, forest environmentalism has been framed, by the media at least, as a contest between environmentalists and the trade union movement, which has sided with the timber corporations. In contrast, activist identification with nature is explored through the notion of spiritual identity (Apoifis 2008; Trigger and Mulcock 2005; Shepherd 2002), stressing the importance of spiritual and emotional dimensions of environmental activism.

BUT WHAT IS NATURE DOING? THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The literature introduced here provide me with valuable insights into radical environmentalist history, identity and culture, but it leaves me asking, "what is nature doing in all of this?" Not very much seems to be the assumption. Having dealt with nature as the source of commitment it becomes passive, a *tabula rasa*, contextual, inert, a backdrop against which activist's lives are lived, protests made and politics played out. This thesis challenges that assumption. It argues that one cannot simply take the activist, or the activist network, out of nature to study, because they are thoroughly and inextricably entangled.

Reading Fox's exploration of the self-transformational mission of deep ecology I was struck by his comment about some people's experience that shakes their assumptions about nature:

The utterly astonishing fact – that things **are** impresses itself upon some people in such a profound way that all that exists seems to stand out as the foreground from a background of non-existence, voidness or emptiness – a background from which this foreground arises moment by moment. This sense of the specialness or privileged nature of all that exists means that "the environment" or the "world at large" is experienced not as a mere backdrop against

which our privileged egos and those identities with which they are most concerned play themselves out, but rather as just as much an expression of the manifesting of Being (that is, of existence per se) as we ourselves are (Fox 1991: 3).

This observation suggested there is something happening in activists' experiences of nature, which, based on my reading, is a gap in the literature, and worthy of further investigation. The book that had the greatest influence upon the development of the inquiry's research questions was written by David Abram. *The Spell of the Sensuous* argues modernity has lost humanity's traditionally reciprocal relationship with more-than-human nature. It opened with the claim that, "we are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human" (Abram 1997: ix). The notion that identity, or awareness of the self, arises through an encounter with the other was in itself not particularly remarkable. But, it was the second clause in that sentence which caught my attention. Abram seemed to be emphasising the possibility of some kind of cordial reciprocity that could be experienced in relationships with the non-human (from the literal Latin 'con' together and 'vivo' to live), as part of the project of realising one's humanness.

I realised that to explore whether nature is an active, rather than passive, participant in the construction and shaping of activist identity and action, the inquiry would need to focus upon the relational dynamics of activist's experiences of nature, and ask about both the meanings activists give to the nature they defend, and the changes that are wrought on them by nature.

Two related questions were developed:

- what are radical environmental activists' perspectives and lived experiences of nature; and

- what identity and meaning-making processes are involved in the relational dynamics between these activists and the nature they are defending?

The next chapter will develop a conceptual framework to guide the investigation into these questions. First, however, the two groups identified as research subjects, by virtue of their activities and their accessibility in Tasmania, will be introduced.

THE ACTIVIST GROUPS THAT ARE THE SUBJECT OF THIS RESEARCH

Two activists groups were identified as suitable for this inquiry, anti-whaling activists who were members of the Sea Shepherd Society and forest activists in Tasmania, who were members of several networks. These groups were chosen because they are both radical in the sense that they reject mainstream environmentalist approaches to achieving change, and engage in illicit direct actions. They are also groups that, in Tasmania at least, are currently active, visible, and receive significant public attention. It was also thought that studying activism in completely different environments (forest and ocean) might present interesting similarities and differences.

There are significant differences between the two activist groups. The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society obstructs whaling and other fishing operations in the Southern Ocean, Pacific Ocean, Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean, that is, its direct actions operate globally. On the other hand the forest networks are concerned with the forests of South Eastern Tasmania. The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is global in terms of its organisational structure and resembles a small corporation run by a charismatic and authoritarian leader, whereas Still Wild Still Threatened is a network of grassroots environmental activists (of whom many represent

other organisations and local communities) that places less emphasis on the role of a chief executive or leader.

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society was formed in 1977 by Captain Paul Watson, a founding member of Greenpeace and a long term environmental activist. Watson left Greenpeace because of disagreement about the use of direct action strategies and Greenpeace's bureaucratisation. Originally founded to protect marine mammals, its charter was extended to the protection of marine life generally. Citing several international conventions, especially the United Nations World Charter for Nature, Sea Shepherd (as it is generally known) argues that the enforcement of whale protection is lawful. Watson "saw a global need to continue direct action conservation activities on the high seas by an organisation that would enforce laws protecting marine wildlife," because countries and the International Whaling Commission had failed to enforce conservation agreements. (This and the following material is sourced from the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society website – Sea Shepherd Conservation Society nd)

The Sea Shepherd's history of direct action begins with the interruption of the annual Canadian harp seal 'harvest'. But attention soon turns to whaling and in 1979 the whaler *Sierra* is rammed in its harbour in Lisbon and then sunk by two activists. Following this, several whaling vessels are sunk and whaling activities in the North Atlantic documented. In 1986 the International Whaling Commission introduced a global moratorium on whaling. The Sea Shepherd turns its attention to Icelandic whaling, destroying two whaling ships and a meat processing plant. These actions establish a program of documenting and sabotaging whaling operations, sometimes receiving aggressive intervention from the state sponsoring the hunting, and using media actions to embarrass the whaling nation. The first campaign in the Southern Ocean takes place over the 2002-03 summer.

After a year break Sea Shepherd resumes Antarctic campaigning each summer.

Sea Shepherd relies solely on donations and most positions are voluntary. The organisation has an effective international network of grassroots fundraising chapters and several vessels, which it uses in its various whaling and other marine campaigns.

Sea Shepherd has experienced strong grassroots support in Australia. It regularly uses its ports for resupply, maintenance and fundraising and has an office in Melbourne. But at a government level its relationship has been more ambivalent, largely because of the dangers involved in Sea Shepherd campaigns and Australia's important economic relationship with Japan. Captain Watson has regularly lambasted the Australian government for failing to enforce whale conservation when hunting takes place in the Australian territorial waters and it has lobbied Australia to take legal and naval action against Japan. (At the time of writing Australia and Japan were engaged in legal proceedings before the International Court of Justice, action initiated by the Australian Commonwealth Government.) The Australian Federal Police has also searched Sea Shepherd vessels returning from the Antarctic at the request of the Japanese government. Retired politicians have served on the Sea Shepherd's advisory boards. For example, Ian Campbell, who was a Commonwealth of Australia environment minister, is listed as a member of the Sea Shepherd legal and law enforcement advisory board. Bob Brown, founder and ex-leader of the Australian Greens, joined Sea Shepherd Australian branch board of directors in December 2012 and supervised the 2012-13 Antarctic campaign, following Interpol's issuing an arrest warrant for Captain Watson.

Finally, Sea Shepherd has been an extraordinarily effective media campaigner. The cover of investigative journalist Heller's 2007 account of a southern ocean campaign describes it as "two parts high-seas swashbuckler

and one part inconvenient truth” and “a story so fantastic it eclipses fiction”. Sea Shepherd has achieved largely positive media exposure (in non-whaling countries at least) through its piratical image and adventuring, spectacular protest actions, sponsorship by media personalities, the failure of state sponsored criminal actions to prosecute Sea Shepherd successfully, and television exposure, such as the Discovery Channel series *Whale Wars* that documented Sea Shepherd southern ocean campaigns, have given the organisation.

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society was identified as a suitable group to research because of its involvement in radical environmentalism (irrespective of its claims that its actions are lawful) and its regular use of Hobart as a point of departure and return to the Antarctic.

The forest activists

The people involved in Tasmania’s direct action protests do not operate under the banner or constraints of a particular organisation, in contrast with the highly organised and professional Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. Activists and potential activists seem to join the forest campaigns by meeting another activist, or simply turning up at the Florentine and offering to help, rather than officially joining an organisation. Two networks are most strongly associated with the forest campaigns of southern Tasmania: the Huon Valley Environment Centre and Still Wild Still Threatened. Another network involved in direct action forest activism that arose during this inquiry and which has members who also operate under or alongside the Huon Valley Environment Centre and Still Wild Still Threatened banners is Code Green Tasmania. This network describes itself as an advocacy organisation based in Launceston, Northern Tasmania (Code Green nd) and it has focused upon actions against the proposed Bell Bay pulp mill, near Launceston, and forestry operations in northeast Tasmania.

The Huon Valley Environment Centre has an office and shop front in Huonville, a small community near Hobart, which is the heart of Southern Tasmania's forestry operations. It describes itself as "a not-for-profit volunteer run organisation in Southern Tasmania which campaigns for the protection of Tasmania's wild places and promotes sustainable living" (Huon Valley Environment Centre nd). Formed in 2001, the Huon Valley Environment Centre was established to focus attention upon the forests of the Weld Valley near Huonville. It relies on community donations, membership subscriptions and volunteers. It is an effective media campaigner, using traditional and social media, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Still Wild Still Threatened is an informal network of activists that has traditionally provided the banner for direct actions in the Florentine and Styx forests, although it has also been engaged in other areas such as the Weld and Recherche Bay. It is informal in the sense that it is not incorporated and does not have paid membership or public governance processes. It describes itself as a "grassroots community organisation campaigning for the immediate protection of Tasmania's ancient forests and the creation of an equitable and environmentally sustainable forestry industry in Tasmania" (Still Wild Still Threatened nd).

Still Wild Still Threatened is the subject and narrative core of investigative journalist Anna Krien's (2010) investigation of Tasmania's forestry battles. She lived with the 'ratbags' or 'ferals' as they described themselves in Hobart and at the Florentine blockade, during part of the research for her book. Krien provides a generally sympathetic description of its culture and commitment to defending Tasmania's old growth forests. Some activists described in Krien's book became research participants in this inquiry.

While it does not have a formal leadership, Still Wild Still Threatened maintains an active new and old media presence. At the time of writing its

current spokesperson was Miranda Gibson, who drew international attention to the Tasmanian forest campaigns through her 449 day tree-sit in the Styx-Florentine forests. Its actions are well organized and target particular forest operations to achieve media exposure. The tactics used, such as the erection of tree-sits, barricades and locking on to forestry infrastructure, require well developed skills and coordination.

Huon Valley Environment Centre and Still Wild Still Threatened have maintained a commitment to direct action and preventing all native forest harvesting in Tasmania since their formation. This has continued throughout the recent negotiations between the state government, forest industry and other environmental groups, that led to the passing of the Tasmanian Forest Agreement Act 2013. The act provides for an overhaul of forestry in Tasmania, including a more than 50% reduction of the legislated saw-log quota and a lengthy process to conserve approximately 500,000 hectares of forest in reserves. In June 2013, 170,000 hectares of forests, including the Weld, Styx and Florentine forests, were accepted by the World Heritage Committee as an extension to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, and approved for national park status by Tasmania's Legislative Council at the end of August 2013. The act contains several repeal triggers that threaten the preservation of the remaining 'future' reserve areas, including a requirement that should environmentalists undertake significant protest actions against Tasmanian forestry, future reserves will lose their protection. The act also provides a series of 'transitional coupes' within the future reserve areas that can be harvested if required to meet saw-log quotas. These conditions were unacceptable to the Huon Valley Environment Centre and Still Wild Still Threatened, and both groups have maintained a campaign of direct actions to protest ongoing harvesting of old growth forests in the reserve areas.

CONCLUSIONS

Radical environmentalism is a response to perceived environmental harm that is generally adopted as the final remaining option before the contested nature is destroyed. It is characterized by direct action tactics and a willingness by the activist to engage in law breaking. The discourses of ecological identification and defence of nature dominate accounts of radical environmentalism. Little attention has been given to the relationships activists form with the nature they are defending and the effect of nature upon their activism, however. This gap in the literature becomes the basis of this inquiry: to investigate the relationships between activists and nature and their effects upon self-identity, conceptualization of nature and social action, based on the premise that nature may be an active element of activist experience.

The two activist groups that are the subject of the investigation use similar tactics but may provide useful contrasts because they operate in different environments (forests and oceans) and have completely different organizational structures and processes. The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is a multi-national non-profit organisation, formally constituted and governed, led since its formation by its creator.

The two main forest networks are different to Sea Shepherd, in terms of their size and scope, although the Huon Valley Environment Centre does have a formal structure, membership and leadership. Still Wild Still Threatened is better thought of as a banner for activists engaged in direct action forest activism in Tasmania, rather than as a formal organization. It seems to reject leadership, although spokespersons represent it to the media. Notwithstanding the lack of a formal leadership, direct actions are well organized and targeted.

Having established the inquiry's research questions and research subjects, the next step on the research journey is to identify the key concepts that will guide the research. This is the subject of the following chapter, which develops a conceptual and theoretical framework.

Chapter 3 Nature, identity and more-than-human agency

Extending the social to include non-humans need not be seen as threatening but instead can be a widening of our understanding of what it means to be human, valuing 'humanity' wherever we find it.

Paul Stevens 2012: 586

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to present the conceptual framework that forms the foundation of this inquiry into the nature-activist relationship. Radical environmental activists' relationships with the nature they are defending, including their experiences and meaning making, is at the heart of this study. I have proposed that for the radical activist, nature, and particularly the nature where they are protesting, may be an active participant in the construction and shaping of their identity and their activism; it affects how they behave socially in the world. I do not suggest this is the only, or major, factor in people's activism, and I learned through my preliminary conversations and formal interviews, that a recurring theme among participants is finding themselves in community with other people who think and feel like them. Nevertheless, I will argue that the nature-activist relationship has been neglected or under-conceptualised.

The framework's development has continued throughout the inquiry. The experience has been one of a dialectic between theory and field data collection and analysis. For example, the theoretical development of key concepts influenced the early interviews, which led to refinement of the conceptual framework, which in turn improved the interviewing. A similar heuristic process occurred during the data analysis, because engaging with

the data forced me to reflect upon and refine the analytical concepts that are presented here.

It was argued in the previous chapter that, while it is obvious that activists care deeply about the place or nature they are defending, it seems to be assumed that non-human nature has little involvement in activist campaigns. This concept of non-human nature does not fit with my own experiences, or the kinds of experiences described by many non-sociological writers and environmental activists. In these writings one reads about a nature that is dynamically involved in the creation and interpretation of human experience and meaning; it is a nature, within which people develop active, possibly reciprocal, relationships with landscapes and things such as wind, mountains, rivers, animals, plants and rock (see, for example, Tredinnick 2003). Such writers describe a nature that can teach what it is to be human, for by encountering otherness and the non-human, our humanness is reflected back to us (for example, Myers and Russell 2003). Paradoxically, by encountering this otherness it is not unusual to experience a sense of familiarity of 'being at home'. Perhaps this is not so surprising. Phenomenologists such as Abram (1997, 2010) point out that modern humans have brains and bodies that evolved to survive within an environment which lacked present-day material comforts, and over which humans held limited control. This was an environment in which humans relied upon the behaviour, signals and perceptions of non-human nature to survive, and which humans continue to rely upon to perceive and engage with the world.

The notion of humans as evolved, and genetically programmed to engage with nature is also central to Wilson's biophilia hypothesis, which argued that humans have an "innate tendency to focus on life and life-like processes" (1984: 1). The startling aspect of this hypothesis is not so much that human's have a biological disposition to focus on non-human nature,

but that it argues that humans have a biologically innate desire to seek from nature, in addition to material needs, a range of other needs, such as aesthetic and spiritual needs (Kellert and Wilson 1993; see also Crowley 2013).

It is not the intent of this thesis to defend or critique these hypotheses. They are introduced to reinforce that interactions with non-human nature seem to have the capacity to be transformative; they change how people act in the world. Several people I have interviewed do not so much go to the forests as forest activists, they go to the forests and *become* deeply committed forest activists as a result of their interactions within the forest. This is the puzzle that I am exploring: what happens when people come into contact with nature and in what ways is this transformative to the point that the person feels it is necessary to protect (this) nature through radical means?

Three key concepts present themselves as candidates to guide an investigation into the activist–nature relationship. They are ‘nature’, ‘identity’ and ‘more-than-human agency’. In this chapter I will define these concepts and explain how I use them. Each concept is able to exist independently of the others, but I have taken care to show that they also express a measure of interdependency; they affect and are affected by each other, and their edges can be ambiguous and overlapping.

NATURE

Nature at first seems easily understood. It is a word generally used to describe the natural, non-human, or material world, or something’s natural character, or innate behaviour. It is also frequently conflated with the non-human environment and the concerns of environmentalism (Franklin 2002). While nature and nature studies have been largely the province of the natural sciences, nature’s relevance to sociology has become

more accepted. This is a relatively recent phenomenon, however. Sociology has been accused of failing to recognise the significance of nature's relationship to social action (for example, Bookchin 1987, and more thoroughly Murphy 1995), preferring to think of humans as so completely different from the non-human, and the physical processes that support us, that social reality is constructed independently from nature (for example, Berger and Luckmann 1991: 65-70).

I acknowledge the vigorous debate that exists between the extremes of realists and social-constructionists about definitions of nature (see Demeritt 2002; White 2008; Pollini 2013), but it is a debate that is unnecessary. The nature or natures that this inquiry is concerned with are, after Angelo (2013: 353), epistemological in that they are concerned with what the research participants *do* with their own understandings about nature, rather than ontological and concerned with what nature *is*. For Franklin the sociologist's purpose is not to ask philosophical questions about the nature of nature per se, but to understand how concepts of nature are used and emerge historically in relation to social and cultural processes, "nature is not for us a concrete reality that may be like this or that, but an idea or series of ideas which specific people (in specific times and places) use to frame and understand their world" (Franklin 2002: 22). This section will survey the ways that nature is understood and develop a definition of how the concept will be used in the inquiry.

Nature is asked to do a lot

Nature, the material world, has its own ontological reality independent of any meanings or symbols given to it by humans. Constructivists contend that nature is also understood and given meanings by people, that is, that nature is something that is culturally inscribed (see Macnaghten and Urry 1998; Franklin 2002). I, after Ingold (1993), will make the assumption that the word nature can be used to describe a world that is real and material,

which exists independently of human experience, but which is also a complex concept imbued with meanings by the social world, being discursively constructed through economic, political and cultural processes. Ingold cautions the reader not to limit their sense of the meaning of nature to a world in which nature is:

the specific sense whose ontological foundation is an imagined separation between the human perceiver and the world, such that the perceiver has to reconstruct the world, in consciousness, prior to any meaningful engagement with it. The world of nature it is often said is what ‘lies’ out there. All kinds of entities are supposed to exist out there, but not you or I. We live ‘in here’, in the intersubjective space marked out by our mental representations. Application of this logic forces an insistent dualism, between object and subject, the material and the ideal, operational and cognised, ‘etic’ and ‘emic’ (Ingold 1993: 154, cited by Franklin 2002: 70).

Nature is a concept that is not found in all cultures and “is not always and everywhere present, but exists only when societies conceptually distinguish themselves from their surroundings” (Scarce, 2000: 3). There are many accounts of traditional, indigenous cultures that do not have conceptual or linguistic separation from nature. Citing Descola (1992), Franklin (2002) introduces accounts of traditional cultures which do not adopt a Cartesian separation of human from nature but which adopt totemic or animistic systems that allow a single social field in which humans and animals occupy different categories of a social continuum. Harvey (2005) provides a detailed exploration of animism and argues that what comes to be called nature is simply a matter of perspective and, for the Amazonian communities he describes, nature is a synonym for other non-human cultures and societies; or in other words, non-humans are perceived as having their own social lives and cultures, that may intersect or overlap human society. He argues

that “the Western categories (and their dichotomisation), ‘object’ and ‘subject’, ‘thing’ and ‘person’ are not naturally self-evident but, rather, locally and experientially determined by those inculcated to see ‘properly’” (Harvey 2005: 151).

In Australia indigenous connection to country is well recognised (for example, Neidjie et al 1985; Rose 1996). Here too, or in some Australian indigenous cultures at least, the notion of nature as other or out there, does not exist. While rooted in the biological need to live successfully in the environment, indigenous cultures have adapted culturally to develop complex relational processes in which the Aboriginal person sees “human identity as tied up, or part of, the environment” (Laudine 2009: 100). The connection between the human actor and the environment is so profound and so concerned with self-identity that, “special sites in country are understood to be part of the self. Responsibility for country is not separated from responsibility for self” (Laudine 2009: 103). While western culture still resonates with the meanings of country (Schama 1996), in Aboriginal culture it is primary and relationships with country must be respected

for many Aboriginal people, everything in the world is alive: animals, trees, rains, sun, moon, some rocks and hills, and people are all conscious. So too are other beings such as the Rainbow Snake, the Hairy People and the Stumpy Men. All have a right to exist, all have their own places of belonging, all have their own Law and culture (Rose 1996: 23).

This experience of kinship with nature is not necessarily something that has been completely lost following European invasion. Charles Perkins said that after completing an initiation ceremony at the age of 55, “I am looking at a tree and one day it was one tree among a lot of trees and the next day it was my friend. I saw somebody else there. I felt at home. I was at home.” (Laudine 2009: 45). These examples are included here to reinforce that the

notion of nature as something from which humans are excluded, or over which humans have dominion, is not a universal experience. Connell argues that it is impossible to understand Aboriginal social structure “without locating it in its particular landscape” and recognising that country is “part of the social order” (Connell 2007: 200). Such examples serve as a reminder that concepts such as identity and agency are understood in different ways by different traditions.

Macnaghten and Urry describe how conceptualisations of nature are constituted by social practices that are discursively ordered, embodied and constructed through the senses, spaced, timed and involve models of human activity, risk, agency and trust (1998: 1). They conclude that “there is no single ‘nature’, only natures. And these natures are not inherent in the physical world but discursively constructed through economic, political and cultural processes, including the shaping of issues.” This inquiry is situated in Tasmania, a political, social and geographical space in which meanings of nature are subject to intense conflict. Environmental activism is at heart a conflict over meanings between dominant, powerful actors’ conceptions of nature and (less powerful) activists. I am reminded that nature is always a concept whose meanings are diverse; there are many natures and “cultural groups socially construct landscapes as reflections of themselves” (Greider and Garkovich 1994: 8). Macnaghten and Urry take this further and go on to write

just as discursive processes construct what we tend to identify as ‘natural’, so too do ideas of nature construct how we think of ourselves. The question emerges as to whether, and in what ways, and through which forms, ideas of nature reconstruct identity and our sense of ourselves as part of, or estranged from, nature (1998: 95).

Unfortunately they do not answer this question. It is a question that has remained largely unaddressed, and which is the subject of this inquiry. Feminist explorations of the nature-identity relationship provide fertile ground in which to unearth answers to Macnaghten and Urry's. While not unique in positing the contribution that Cartesian dualism and rationalism in modernity have made to the nature-human divide and, in particular, the "western construction of human identity as 'outside' nature" (Plumwood 1993: 2), ecofeminist thought provides what may be a useful way into the specific problems of this inquiry, namely transformations in the relationship between identity and nature. For Plumwood masculine forms of colonisation and oppression have, particularly through dualisms such as culture/nature, reason/nature, male/female and mind/body, created a 'master rationality' or 'master story' which has led to the current environmental crisis, and from which it is so hard to escape, because their logic and form is so deeply entrenched in the way we understand and inhabit the world. The answer lies in realising that these dualisms, which have been reified, are social and political artifacts. This does not require a rejection of reason, but the creation of a:

democratic culture beyond dualism, ending colonising relationships and finding a mutual, ethical basis for enriching coexistence with earth others ...We can explore the rationality of the mutual self, the self which can take joy in the flourishing of others, which can acknowledge kinship but also feast on the other's resistance and grow strong on their difference (Plumwood 1993: 196).

Plumwood explores the nature (reality) versus culture and representation (constructivism) argument, arguing that it is problematic to think in binaries that analytically distinguish humans from nature, giving rise to 'hyperseparation' (Plumwood 2002: 49; see also Latour's (1993) description of 'hyper-incommensurability'). She writes that "the assumption that

nature/culture frameworks are segregated and hyperseparate is one of the foundational illusions of western culture, and the first point of an ecological consciousness must be to correct it" (Plumwood 2006: 142-143). In this respect, she agrees with ecofeminists such as Haraway, who argue that the hyperseparation principle fails to acknowledge that, rather than occurring in parallel universes, human and nature exist within the same universe and are related. What is required, Plumwood argues, is a dialectic of nature that recognises the differences between human culture and non-human nature, but that allows us to embrace non-dualistic ways of relating to nature, such as indigenous accounts that valorise non-human agency and that are less human-centred. Such a dialectic should recognise the interdependency of nature and culture, acknowledging that at times they are symmetrically dependent and at other times one may enable the other. Central to the concept of a collaborative nature-culture dynamic is that agency becomes a concept that must be extended beyond humans to the many different kinds of 'agents' that create the world (Plumwood 2006: 127). (Non-human agency is the third concept in this inquiry's conceptual framework and Plumwood's thinking will be explored further in that section.) By removing, or avoiding, dualisms, ecofeminism emphasises relational connections and urges a way of treating the world we inhabit with compassion and kinship because we are, "members of the wider family in life," and our task, much as a mother does within a family, "is to restore the set of relationships which will enable the family to function as a healthy system" (Merchant 1980: 164). While the metaphor of family and the role of the mother is loaded, the message that humans can and should relate differently to nature, if the effects of human impact on environment are to be addressed, is clear.

There is no need here to undertake a deeper analysis of the ways in which nature may be defined or constituted. We could for example devote space to exploring how historical, mythic and fictional accounts of nature inform our present cultural and individual experiences and notions of nature (see

Schama 1995). For example, I find it difficult to walk through mountainous areas such as the Himalayas or Southwest Tasmania without recalling and superimposing over the landscape my childhood imaginings of Tolkien's Middle Earth. What I have hoped to demonstrate is that nature refers to something beyond the human (notwithstanding that humanity is part of nature) that may be existentially real (for example a rock or tree, or landscape) and imagined (the real overlain with mythic, or historical meanings), and that the creation of meanings given to nature is a social process which, among other things, profoundly affects human identity.

Nature as it is used in this inquiry

Nature is, therefore, a collaboration between the real and the representations it is given through social processes. In this inquiry 'nature' will be asked to perform two things. It will denote the natural world, including humans, and connote the culturally and linguistically constructed meanings that are given to the non-human natural world. It is impossible to separate nature from human culture. Or, as Casey puts it, "nature is not just *around* us; or rather, there is *no getting around* nature, which is at all times *under* us, indeed *in* us ... nature resists dichotomising, even as it submits to analysis and reflection" (Casey 1993: 186).

A more useful word than 'nature' or 'non-human nature', and the one that best describes my usage, is 'the more-than-human world'. This term, coined by Abram (1997) recognises that the world extends beyond human beings and their cognitive constructions to encompass the whole natural universe, including living and non-living entities, of which we are a part. It overcomes the semantic separation from nature invoked by 'non-human' and encourages us to think of humans as existing in a communicative, reciprocal relationship with nature. I have chosen, however, to use the term 'nature' rather than 'the more-than-human world' for ease of reading.

Finally, we have discussed what nature represents. But what is its value in this conceptual framework, other than to state the obvious that environmental activists are engaged in defending non-human nature through a contest of ideas about nature and the importance of this particular nature? I think the answer lies in the relationship between conceptualisation and action (Halsey and White 1998). White (2008: 11-12) describes three perspectives of nature, anthropocentrism, ecocentrism and biocentrism, that represent a continuum from a human-centred conception of nature in which the non-human has instrumental value, to a perspective that gives humans the same moral worth as non-human species. This assumes that how people perceive nature may affect the content of their experiences and how they respond.

The concept of nature as it is defined here, presents itself as a useful analytical device to learn whether and how activists' understanding of nature has evolved, and affected, how they act in the world.

SELF-IDENTITY

I have observed that radical activists, spending time in the nature they are defending, are transformed and, in part, these transformations are wrought through an active engagement with nature. I have also observed, albeit superficially, that a relationship exists between the way nature is conceived and human identity. I want to use the concept of identity to better understand the impact of nature upon the activist. Activists' emerging, or transforming, identities may be a manifestation of their dialogic relationship with nature (acknowledging of course that nature is not the only source of transformation in activist lives). The concept of identity will assist us to understand this manifestation. I will explain how I use the term identity and why the concept of a 'narrative identity' is particularly useful in understanding and inquiring into radical environmental activists' engagement with nature.

Identity is asked to do a lot

'Identity', like 'nature' is a word which seems to have obvious, commonsense meanings. But, as Brubaker and Cooper argue it is a word that is variously asked to do too much, too little, or to be ambiguous (2000: 1). 'Identity', according to Brubaker and Cooper:

is used to highlight non-instrumental modes of action; to focus on self-understanding rather than self-interest; to designate sameness across persons or sameness over time; to capture allegedly core, foundational aspects of selfhood; to deny that such core, foundational aspects exist; to highlight the processual, interactive development of solidarity and collective self-understanding; and to stress the fragmented quality of the contemporary experience of 'self', a self unstably patched together through shards of discourse and contingently 'activated' in differing contexts (2000: 8).

This multiplicity of uses and meanings (what Erikson (1956) described as an 'identity crisis'), means that the use of 'identity' as an analytical concept demands clarification, particularly given it is used in different ways in accounts of political and social action (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 6-8). Bendle warns that identity's "under-theorised and received position in discourse also means that people can invoke 'identity' in a positive and compelling fashion without being required to specify adequately the meaning they attach to the term" (2002: 5). I will outline here how I define and use the concept 'identity'. I will then discuss how this understanding of identity guides my methodological approach.

This conceptual framework is being used to guide an inquiry into activists' experiences of nature. I am, therefore, most interested in individual, or self-identity. However, the notion of groups of individuals sharing and intersubjectively shaping a collective identity is clearly important in two ways. First, the notion of group identity is something that the individual

uses to reflexively assess their own identity and, secondly, group identity becomes a powerful force or influence upon individual identity. Identity is a necessarily social practice and the importance of culture in group identity and its moral dimensions is fundamental, “culture, for a society, a group, or a person, is a continual process of sustaining an identity through the coherence gained by a consistent aesthetic point of view, a moral conception of self, and a style of life which exhibits those conceptions” (Bell 1979: 36). There is not space here to provide a comprehensive overview of identity, its formation and dimensions. The following paragraphs provide an overview of the development of identity as an explanation of the self and how the concept of narrative is integral to an understanding of self-identity that allows sameness and fluidity to coexist.

Briefly, self-identity as it is used by sociologists and other Western disciplines became important in the rise of modernity (Baumeister 1986). Of course, the concept of the self had been known far earlier, although Descartes is perhaps most frequently given credit for the discovery of the self in modernity, with his famous statement published in 1637 “I think, therefore I am.” The social changes that occurred during the Enlightenment, industrial revolution and the romantic response to rationalism placed greater burden upon individuals to assess and determine their place in the world. For Giddens the changes wrought upon society in late modernity, and global institutions in particular, have also wrought changes upon the self and, “because of the ‘openness’ of social life today, the pluralisation of contexts of action and the diversity of ‘authorities’, lifestyle choice is increasingly important in the constitution of self-identity and daily activity” (1991: 5). In other words, in the absence of traditional pathways and identities, self-identity becomes constructed through the lifestyle choices that one makes.

Identity has become a “model of the self that provided a sense of continuous, personal self-sameness over time while allowing for adaptation to rapid social change and differentiation” (Bendle 2002: 16). Such a model takes us to the heart of the paradoxical nature of identity, that is, the sense of sameness and the realisation that identity has temporal, dynamic and reflexive qualities. Not everyone accepts this apparent paradox and an ongoing debate is whether the person has a core, unchanging identity or whether it is fluid and multiple. This is a debate that can be characterised as a dialectic between the extremes of essentialism (the existence of an unchanging self) and constructionism (identity as socially mediated, dialogic, impermanent and fragmented). I will argue for a definition in this inquiry that is situated between these extremes.

While our sense of ourselves might seem constant throughout our lifespan (we speak to ourselves with the same familiar voice) a few moments reflection about the person we were and the person we have become dispels any notion of a completely essentialist explanation of identity. I acknowledge the sense of sameness that I have known throughout my lifespan, but I also recognise that our sense of who we are is influenced by our social relationships. I therefore favour an understanding of the self that recognises its essentially unitary nature, and which allows a constructivist interpretation of identity, an identity that is social in nature (that is never alone), that is evolving, reflexive and influenced by the subject’s milieu (which would include class, gender and race). In other words this inquiry accepts a somewhat paradoxical nature of identity and while not fully rejecting an essentialist definition, leans towards a constructivist stance.

Goffman (1959, 1969) extends our appreciation of identity by explaining that identity is not only a dynamic phenomenon, but also multifaceted and contextual in nature; it has a performative aspect in which the person presents themselves differently according to the audience (and the way the

audience treats the person) and the social context. Goffman compared the way people behave in front of and towards others with theatre – identity as performance (1959: 15). This notion of dramaturgical performance, and the relationship between private and public identity is particularly useful to this inquiry when activists appear to consciously adopt dramaturgical tactics before the media and public.

The notion that identity in late modernity is reflexive is, according to Giddens, a defining feature of self-identity, “in the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour” (Giddens 1991: 5). As such it is intimately bound and interpreted through the stories that we tell about ourselves and our experiences. The autobiographical nature of identity is an ongoing, creative process which integrates objective experiences with the person’s subjective experience and interpretive explanation. It is “at the core of self-identity” (Giddens 1991: 76). For Maines self-identity is defined by narrative, “I propose that the self-abstracted person, so clearly seen in adulthood, is one who has acquired a biography and thereby can tell his or her life story. A person thus is defined as a self-narrating organism” (1993: 23).

Self-identity as narratively constituted

Douglas Ezzy (1998) stimulated me to think about the relationships between temporality and narrative, citing Mead’s (1934) thinking about the significance of time in the construction of identity and consciousness, and Ricoeur’s (1992) conception of a narrative identity that is hermeneutic and heuristic. Both thinkers outline a self that is neither atomistic nor a linguistic device but “a product of narratives of self-consistency through life’s changes” (Ezzy 1998: 245), that is intensely social and that, to be understood, must recognise social norms and organisation.

Importantly, for this inquiry, a theory of identity as narratively constituted over time provides a framework with which to understand how experiences of nature can affect the individual. But Ricoeur's analysis of the self also permits two more issues that are central to this inquiry. First a narrative identity, one in which we use stories to understand where we have been, provides a range of options and ideas about who we are and who we might become (and how as a researcher I might investigate this phenomenon), "by narrating a life of which I am not the author as to existence, I make myself its co-author as to its meaning" (Ricoeur 1992: 162). Second, a narrative analysis gives identity an intensely ethical character. Not only does the self become recognisable through its encounter with the other, reconciling Ricoeur's *idem*, or sameness identity, and *ipse*, or self-identity, and reconciling the apparent paradox described earlier, but Ricoeur argues that a narrative conception of self makes "narration serve as a natural transition between description and prescription" (1992: 170). In other words, narrative identity allows us to understand the self's constancy and its fluidity, a fluidity that is narratively interpreted, and its temporal qualities with respect to its histories (and subsequent reinterpretations) and its possible futures.

So, Ricoeur has provided a way of understanding the self that is constituted by and in narratives and that is processual in nature. Mead (1934) before him stressed the importance of other consciousnesses in identity development. Mead's recognition of the intersubjective dimensions of identity formation, that identity, meaning and mind arise through interaction with others, is fundamental to my use of identity in this inquiry. Of course, our dialogues do not just take place with real others, they also take place with imagined others, or other voices within us. We, to use Athens, soliloquise with "phantom others, who are not present, but whose impact upon us is no less than the people who are present during our social

experiences” (Athens 1994: 525). This inner speech, or “self interaction” (Blumer 1969: 73) is how we construct meaning and action.

Narrative therefore, becomes something that is used to understand the world and to explain self-identity. In this respect narrative takes on an ontological character in addition to providing a useful epistemological stance; it is “the vehicle, the means of communication and it is the communication, as it unfolds over time, between narrative consciousnesses” (Rankin 2002: 8).

The significance of place

I also want to suggest that the concepts of identity and nature are closely related. While it seems obvious, I have found it useful to remind myself that the human mind and awareness of self is only possible within the context of nature, and in particular temporality and spatiality. Human identity and nature are inseparable. Malpas, in his philosophical exploration of place and experience, establishes the idea of place “as that wherein the sort of being that is characteristically human has its ground” (1999: 33). He argues that human identity is inextricably related to place and landscape:

we are the sort of thinking, remembering, experiencing creatures we are only in virtue of our active engagement in place; that the possibility of mental life is necessarily tied to such engagement, and so to the places in which we are so engaged; and that, when we come to give content to our concepts of ourselves and to the idea of our own self-identity, place and locality play a crucial role - our identities are, one can say, intricately and essentially place-bound (1999: 177).

The description of self-identity that I have developed so far is based on Western thought. In the same way that the concept nature is not ubiquitous, non-Western cultures do not necessarily conceive of or

experience identity in the same way. We have already seen how closely Australian Indigenous identity can be tied to country. Ingold, citing Bird-David (1999) and Hallowell (1976) describes how, for the Ojibwa people of North America, identity is a relational concept that is experienced and emerges, “in the unfolding of those very relations that are set up by virtue of a being’s positioning *in* the world, reaching out into the environment – and connecting with other selves [in this case, thunder] – along these relational pathways” (Ingold 2000: 103). I could as easily have introduced this notion in our discussion of nature or the following discussion about more-than-human agency. In Ojibwa culture at least, the three concepts that form the theoretical framework for this inquiry are tightly bound; identity, the lifeworld and other members of this lifeworld are relational, interdependent and collaborative.

Self-identity as it is used in this inquiry

This review of self-identity has been necessarily brief and selective. It does not mean to be a comprehensive overview of its development and usage as a concept, or of the range of theoretical approaches by which it can be understood. I could have, for example, explored post-structural or feminist explanations. Self-identity has been chosen as an analytical concept to assist me to investigate whether nature is an active component of activist experience. This definition has focussed, therefore, on the fluid or dynamic aspects of self-identity. While not contradicting an essentialist definition of identity as an unchanging self, I have accepted the paradox that emphasis be given to a conceptualisation of a malleable self-identity. The processes by which self-identity changes, have temporal and spatial dimensions. Self-identity has also been understood as a social achievement; it arises through interactions with others. Self-identity change is constituted through narratives because who we are depends on the stories we tell about ourselves. Finally, the narrative dimension of selfhood gives a moral character to autobiography and future behaviour.

Self-identity presents itself as a useful concept with which to operationalize the effects of nature, if any, upon the research participants. We now have concepts to understand the setting in which activism takes place and how it (nature) is conceptualized by the activists, and the lived experience of nature (self-identity). A third concept is necessary to describe the ways in which nature might be understood as active. I have called this concept 'more-than-human agency'.

MORE-THAN-HUMAN AGENCY

At this inquiry's centre is the quest to understand how nature, or the non-human other (whether this is, for example, an individual tree or a complex multi-member ecological system such as a forest or landscape), might be involved in activist self-identity (trans)formation. This quest is the primary motivating curiosity behind my inquiry and it will take this thesis into what is, from a sociological perspective, relatively unexplored terrain. In this section I will introduce the concept of more-than-human agency as the third analytic concept in this inquiry's framework. I will consciously use 'more-than-human' here to emphasise the phenomenon of human agency as one of many forms of agency situated within a spectrum of agencies present within nature.

I have found this concept the most difficult to clarify and communicate. More-than-human agency, or non-human agency as it is generally called in the literature, has been used to make multiple ontological and epistemological claims about the nature of nature, and human's relationships with it, that draw upon philosophy, science, anthropology, geography and sociology. It tends to be conceived at different levels of abstraction, and although at times it seems tangible, it then slips from my grasp, defies rational explanation, and takes on a more nebulous and mysterious character. Despite these difficulties, it is argued that more-than-human agency is a useful concept to investigate the experience of nature

acting or doing things, especially nature acting or doing things in relation to humans. This section will survey more-than-human agency before arriving at a definition of how it will be used.

The experiential power of nature

I have introduced this thesis by telling three stories about my experiences of the non-human. One of these described launching my paraglider into a thermal and sharing it with several griffon vultures, the second meeting an ermine, and the third my dawning appreciation of and response to an ancient gum tree. Experiences such as these, and the impact they have had on my personal evolution, assisted me to recognise a gap in environmentalism scholarship that forms the basis of this inquiry. This gap is the experiential power of nature, which I argue can be understood through the concept 'more-than-human-agency'.

Engaging with the concept of more-than-human agency enables one to explore nature-human relationships in ways that are not accessible if agency is restricted to that part of nature which is human. The recognition of more-than-human agency radically alters the sociological gaze from a view of a passive nature filled with objects, to a multi-faceted, dynamic world of manifold, constitutive relationships with non-human subjects. How might agency be extended to nature and how might a form of agency that is experienced when humans are in relationship with nature (which, of course, we always are) become a useful sociological concept? This section will group the various treatments of agency, found in the literature, into three categories. The first completely rejects extending agency to the non-human, arguing that this is something that only humans can exercise. The second identifies dimensions of human agency, such as sentience and intentionality, in other mostly animal species. The third approach (or more accurately several approaches) reconfigures agency into a broader concept than traditional explanations of human agency, one which extends agency

to all nature, including human made artifacts. This approach, which I will refer to as *relational agency*, concentrates upon actors', or actants', ability to create effects that respond to and change the world. I will briefly describe the three approaches before embarking on a discussion and defining more-than-human agency as it is used in this conceptual framework.

1 More-than-human agency rejected

Agency has generally been treated by sociology as a uniquely human capacity with an ontological and epistemological perspective that views agency in human terms, which sees the human and non-human worlds as distinct from each other and which considers attempts to identify agency in the more-than-human as forms of representation such as anthropomorphism. Agency describes the human's capacity to act willfully rather than determinatively, that is to think and then act. Humans possess agency because they have interiority, sentience, intentionality, language, autonomy and power. Further, they form complex cultures that are not matched by non-human species. Traditionally sociology has viewed such characteristics as unique to humans and not found among non-human species, whose decision making is thought to be determined by genetics rather than complex cognitive processes.

Sociology was born at the height of the Enlightenment and industrial revolution. Humanity had proved itself triumphant over nature and our ontological attitude towards nature was one of domination because "we remade the material world to make it so" (Pickering 2008: 13). Modern humanity's conceptual separation from nature has already been presented, including Plumwood's analysis of dualities and hyper-separation. Plumwood also provides an explanation of the historical reasons why agency has been denied to the non-human. She suggests more-than-human agency is denied because of the 'rationalist dualisms' that authorise humanity's domination of nature and in which agency is restricted to humans:

when the colonising party comes to believe that they are radically different and superior to the subordinated party, who is coded as nature, they can come to believe too that they are beyond ecology and unlike other animals, especially in urban contexts. They are likely to devalue or deny the Other's agency and their own dependency on this devalued Other, treating it as either inessential and substitutable or as the unimportant background to their foreground (2002: 29).

For Clark modernity's rejection of non-human agency is not so much about the domination of nature, as it is a retreat from the existential threats posed by natural forces. He describes how Kant and the philosophers who followed him steered, "clear of the what the turbulent forces of the universe could do on their own account [and] focus firmly on the various achievements and potentialities of human agency" (2011: xii-xiii). There are more explanations for the resistance to the notion of agency in the non-human (we could, once again invoke Descartes), but it is not necessary here to explore this further and to do so seems trite.

The concept of human agency is robust and has adequately served sociology. In much sociological research the humanist definition of agency is perfectly adequate. But, like the physicist who seeks to understand light, who by asking wave questions gets wave answers, or particle questions gets particle answers, "the understanding of agency depends significantly on the precise theoretical questions being posed" (Jones and Cloke 2008: 80). An expanded understanding of agency is required to answer questions about the relationship between nature and identity, because the premise of this investigation is that nature acts in some way to affect self-identity.

2 Extension of human agency to the non-human

Extending agency to non-humans requires sociology to overcome its historical human exemptionalism (Stevens 2012: 586). Advances in animal

behaviour studies raise the possibility that some animals at least, such as primates, dolphins and human pets, possess traits and abilities that resemble characteristics of humans. Animals that use tools, teach others, express empathy, make plans, or which have sophisticated communication and social arrangements, suggest that human agency is not unique and that a continuum stretches from humans to lower order animals (Stevens 2012: 586). Efforts have been made, therefore, to extend human oriented definitions of agency to animals (for example, Ingold 1988: 1-16; Plumwood 2006: 122; Haraway 2008). Dogs are an example of a species that, perhaps because it has coevolved with humans, is frequently cited as having recognisable forms of agency (Haraway 2008; Gruen 2009: 27). Steward (2009), describes the developing child's acquisition of the concept of agency, including animate and inanimate categories, and our phenomenological intuition of animal agency. She argues for an appreciation of agency that is less restrictive, writing that human "intuition deserves not to be lost underneath the mountain of epistemological scrupulousness, mechanomorphism, anti-dualist fervour, and behaviouristic scientific methodology that has obscured the concept of agency" (Steward 2009: 229).

If one is to extend agency to the landscape or systems level (without reducing it to a single unit), a way of conceptualising non-human agency beyond animals is necessary. We could explore religious and spiritual systems, such as animism, that recognise the agency of non-human nature (see, for example, Harvey 2005; Taylor 2010: 86-97; Hall 2011), and this could reasonably be expected to accord with the spiritual beliefs of some environmentalists. We could also review indigenous knowledge and, given the location of this inquiry, Australian indigenous perspectives, in which country is understood to be literally alive and sentient, and in which the landscape is a personality, composed of many individual, related beings that share ancestral, kinship relationships (Rose 1996: 65). I want to describe

perspectives that have arisen within contemporary Western society. This is not to negate the value of traditional Indigenous knowledge, and indeed, the ideas I introduce here frequently draw upon and refer to Indigenous knowledge.

First, I would like to devote more space to explore the notion of a more-than-human-agency that exists independently of the presence of humans. I rely here largely on the discussions by Jones and Cloke (2002 and 2008) who provide a detailed overview and argument about why trees should be recognised as having agency in their own right. They argue that a barrier to recognition of non-human agency, and in particular the agency of trees, is the anthropocentric time scale. Human action is, of course, vitally important but in evolutionary, geological or cosmic timescales the actions of the non-human become far more apparent and significant. So, if “we were seeking to understand the agency of trees and other plant organisms, their routinized involvement in the evolving fabric of existence would be an important starting point” (2002: 55).

Jones and Cloke identify four ways in which the non-human have agency, using trees as an example, (2008: 80-1) and I have paraphrased them here:

- agency as routine action: trees are associated with a series of ongoing processes of existence which enable them to grow, reproduce, bear fruit, spread, colonise and so on (Jones and Cloke 2002: 54-7).
- agency as transformative action: trees can transform the places in which they live, demonstrating the capacity to act autonomously and relationally with humans (Jones and Cloke 2002: 57-9).
- agency as purposive action: while trees do not express the same kinds of intentionality as humans, they nonetheless engage in purposive behaviours, responding to the environments in which they live (Jones and Cloke 2002: 59-63).

- agency as non-reflexive action: trees, while not having the kind of reflexive agency that humans are considered to express (noting that much human behaviour is habitual and unintentional, rather than reflexive), are engaged in creative being and becoming (Jones and Cloke 2002: 63-6).

Other writers take their comparisons of plants with humans further, arguing that recent scientific findings reveal that aspects of sentience and consciousness can be found in plants (Hall 2011; Marder 2013). But, the point of this discussion is not to become entangled in the validity or otherwise of such claims, because it is simply to present ideas about agency of the non-human.

Agency manifested by the non-‘living’

Jones and Cloke provide a way of extending agency to the world of trees, but there still remains the world of the ‘non-living’. Is it possible to use the above ideas to recognise other actors in nature? Can we extend agency to the river that expresses its ‘riveness’ as it winds its way to the sea, or a rock its unique ‘rockness’ with a geological history that pre-dates humanity and that will likely exist long after humans have disappeared? Or even extend it to the Indigenous Australian’s ‘nurturing terrain’ (Rose 1996) that provides life and which shapes their relationship with their lifeworld? I think it is possible if one’s definition of agency is decoupled from a set of exclusively human characteristics (for example, agreement is required about intentionality) and reconceptualised as multidimensional or a spectrum of characteristics, such that the type of agency recognised in a tree is different to that recognised in a river, or a rock, or a landscape. Such a concept acknowledges animal, plant and other actors in nature; it turns them from objects into subjects (or better removes the dualism), which in turn creates the possibility of relationship and a sense of dialogue.

Significant for this study also is that such a reconfiguration of agency raises ethical questions about the kind of relationships humans ought to have with a nature that is not regarded as passive (see Warkentin (2010) regarding animals and Marder (2013) regarding vegetal life). Such questions are already present, of course, regarding the ethical treatment of animals as food sources, for example. But what are the consequences of the recognition of ‘humanlike’ qualities in the non-human for environmental activists?

3 Relational agency

Having raised the possibility, at least, of more-than-human agency, I want to explore the ways in which such a concept can be brought to bear upon human action and identity. I will do this by examining three approaches to more-than-human agency that are concerned with relations between the more-than-human and the human subject, which I will call collectively ‘relational agency’. The key ingredient of relational agency, from a sociological perspective, is the dynamic interplay between human subject and non-human subject. The three perspectives focus upon the experience of being acted upon by the non-human other and the implications of the relationship. They are Actor Network Theory and associated approaches; ecofeminism, in particular Val Plumwood’s philosophy; and the phenomenological tradition, as it is espoused by David Abram.

I am consciously choosing three approaches operating within contemporary, Western society. This is not to disregard the value of traditional Indigenous knowledge, some of which I have referred to earlier in this chapter, and which all approaches acknowledge and draw upon, but to maintain a Western gaze on this peculiarly modern problem.

Actor Network Theory

Actor Network Theory, which originated in science and technology studies, provides a comprehensive approach to recognising and theorising agency. It does this by conceiving social life as a material-semiotic web of relationships in which material things and concepts are constantly creating and recreating an heterogeneous network of actors (or more properly 'actants'), in which agency, rather than being a unitary concept, is performed through the relationships or networks of actants. For Actor Network Theory "any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor – or, if it has no figuration yet, an actant" (Latour 2005: 71). Non-humans are recognised as actors "and not simply the hapless bearers of symbolic projection" (Latour 2005: 10). Citing the example of an army, Latour suggests sociologists approach their analysis of an army as if it is naked, neglecting to recognise the involvement of the material clothing, equipment, and other material things in human action. Actor Network Theory, Latour argues, does not distinguish between people and 'material stuff'. It removes subject-object and human versus non-human distinctions, and seeks to give symmetry to relationships between things as things happen (Latour 2005: 75-6). In this sense, it seems less concerned with the humanness of the human actor than the relationship as it is performed and changed. Agency becomes, "a relational achievement, involving the creative presence of organic beings, technological devices and discursive codes, as well as people in the fabric of everyday living" (Whatmore 1999: 26).

Actor Network Theory's achievement, and its relevance to this study, is that it provides a way of bypassing the problematic described earlier, in the discussion of nature, as a dialectic between nature and society. By decoupling agency from individuated subjects, Actor Network Theory removes the need for intentionality, a key component of human agency; agency becomes the outcome of "interactions within a network"

(Lockie 2004: 35). Where Actor Network Theory seems to stop, and where this inquiry is most concerned to venture, is the connection between the felt experience of more-than-human agency and its relation to human action, that is, humans' subjectivities. Actor Network Theory removes the obstacle of a nature-society boundary and achieves a more ecological explanation of the 'co-construction' of nature-human relations (Murdoch 2001), but it is the experience of this boundary and people's efforts to transcend it that is a subject of this investigation. Actor Network Theory's removal of human and non-human distinctions, and the abstract nature of actor networks reduce its usefulness as an explanation that can drive my inquiry's methodology. This is because it does not give enough attention to the implications of more-than-human agency for human identity and action, and I am primarily concerned with the human subject. Put simply, Actor Network Theory provides a structure to explain how the non-human can affect the human's experience, the actor-network, but it does not assist me to inquire into the meanings that activists give to their experiences of more-than-human nature and how this leads to action.

Ecofeminism, articulated by Val Plumwood

Val Plumwood's presentation of an ecofeminist philosophy of nature provides a way of engaging with more-than-human-agency and the ethical consequences arising from such engagement. I have already described her analysis of nature so I will restrict this discussion to her views about more-than-human agency. For Plumwood, it is the stance which one adopts towards 'earth others' that determines whether or not more-than-human agency is recognised. She argues that avoiding the dualisms that lead to hyperseparation from nature, which renders it a passive, mechanistic object, and choosing "more generous conceptual stances that maximise our sensitivity to the non-human world" (Plumwood 2002: 175), affects what is and is not accepted as agency. What is required are "knowledge frameworks

that bring into the foreground our relationships with nature” (Weir 2008: 153). Plumwood develops an “intentional recognition” stance (1993, 2002) towards the more-than-human world that “is one of a number of counter-hegemonic practices of openness and recognition able to make us aware of agentic and dialogical potentialities of earth others that are closed off to us in the reductive model that strips intentional qualities from out of nature and hands them back to us as our projections” (2002: 177).

Such a stance, one that focusses upon humans’ relationships and connection with nature, establishes the possibilities of communication, collaboration and care for the more-than-human world, because accepting more-than-human agency gives rise to the recognition that humans share the world with other agents. Plumwood asserts that counter-hegemonic practices (see 2002: 194) assist the individual to recognise other kinds of beings. Key among these is listening and attentiveness (see also Warkentin 2010), and an ethical attitude and skill set (that will emerge through interviews with the research subjects) that “allow us to be receptive to unanticipated possibilities and aspects of the non-human other, reconceiving and reencountering them as potentially communicative and agentic beings with whom we ourselves must negotiate and readjust” (Plumwood 2002: 195).

Plumwood’s philosophical analysis of the relationship between nature, culture and humanity is different from another important ecofeminist, Haraway, whose work has influenced the shaping of Actor Network Theory (for example, Haraway 1991), and who argues that nature and culture, or ‘naturecultures’ are indistinguishable. For Plumwood, nature and human culture are ontologically separate (Plumwood 2006: 142-6) and to fail to recognise this is to fall into the trap of believing that like culture, nature is malleable, rather than recognising the ecological fact of nature’s limits. Plumwood’s analysis of nature-human relationships, one that invokes non-

human agency but which recognizes the role of human meaning and culture making about (rather than with) nature, recommends itself to my investigation.

Recognising more-than-human agency creates the possibility of dialogue (that is, a listening to and responding to nature) between human and other actors and the opportunity to experience the world through the non-human other (Plumwood 2002: 227-9). This idea is explored in detail by Abram (1997, 2010), particularly in *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1997), in which he provides a passionate and eloquent defence of more-than-human agency, through his explorations of phenomenology, animism and 'shape-shifting'. It is to him that I finally turn before concluding this survey.

The phenomenology of David Abram

For Abram more-than-human agency is a necessary and intrinsic part of human consciousness. Having evolved as ecological animals our senses and our cognitions are caused by and bound within nature. To speak, therefore, of nature acting upon the human is to express how we experience and interpret the more-than human world. Abram asks why modernity has lost its ability to experience and pay attention to nonhuman nature with the, "heightened sensitivity to extrahuman reality, the profound attentiveness to other species and to the Earth that is evidenced in so many of these cultures, and that had so altered my awareness that my senses now felt stifled and starved by the patterns of my own culture" (Abram 1997: 27).

Drawing upon animist and shamanic traditions, the phenomenology of Husserl and, in particular, the work of Merleau-Ponty, Abram argues that modern humanity should reacquaint itself with the sensorial world in which we dwell, rather than seeking to be a mind somehow detached from the world, to create a philosophy that gives, "voice to the world from our experienced situation *within* it, recalling us to our participation in the here-

and-now, rejuvenating our sense of wonder at the fathomless things, events and powers that surround us on every hand” (Abram 1997: 47). I shall explore Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology in the methodology chapter, because phenomenology, and Abram’s insistence upon paying attention to the embodied nature of human perception and cognition, may prove useful in articulating activists’ experiences using the concept of more-than-human-agency. Bron Taylor’s interviews with environmental activists suggest that such an approach will resonate. For example, one of his research participants reported:

connecting to the tree is not [hesitating], it’s like just being [pausing], it’s not like you talk to the tree, because it can’t hear, but there’s this feeling, I don’t know how to describe it, [it is], like a deep rootedness, very powerful, not superior to us, but certainly not inferior to us and more primitive or less evolved than us (Taylor 2010: 95).

Such experiences matter because they do not just improve our use of our senses, they deepen our appreciation of our coexistence with an alert and animate nature. To quote another phenomenologist, describing his encounter with a black bear:

in moments like this, something flutters *open*. Shifting fields of relations bloom. Wind stirs nothing. Not just my alertness and sudden attention, but the odd sensation of knowing that these trees, this creek, this bear, are all *already* alert to me in ways proper to each and despite my attention. Something flutters *open*, beyond this centered self (Jardine 1997).

The three approaches to relational agency, described in this section, place relationships at their centre. Abrams’s phenomenology seems to come closest to describing more-than-human agency as it is experienced by this

author at least. The combination of Plumwood's philosophical analysis and Abram's (also a philosopher) phenomenology of the human's experience of nature, provides a way of understanding more-than-human agency that is more useful than Actor Network Theory's seemingly self evident observations about human non-human interactions and fields of relations. This is because it strikes me that, somewhat ironically, Actor Network Theory's networks remain rather passive and abstract constructs, with regard to their approach to identity at least, whereas Abram's approach literally animates the more than human world. I also favour the phenomenological analysis because it explores the experience in its immediacy. I agree with Hay who, talking about place research, "turns increasingly to the *experiencers* of place for insights and inspiration," because he wishes to learn from, "people whose intermediation with it is unencumbered with the shaping insights of theory" (Hay 2003: 273).

Finally, Abram seems to remain passionately devoted to the human subject. This is my interest also. How does the more-than-human world act upon the human among other humans and non-humans? I will give Abram the last word as he argues that experiencing the world as agentic is important to develop an authentic sense of self,

for it's only by turning our bodily attention toward *another* that we experience the convergence and reassembly of our separate senses into a dynamic unity. Only by entering into relation with others do we effect our own integration and coherence. Such others might be people, or they might be wetlands, or works of art, or snakes slithering through the stubbled grass. Each thing, attentively pondered, gathers our sense together in a unique way. This juncture, this conjoining of divergent senses *over there*, in the other, leads us to experience that other as a centre of experience in its own

right, and hence as another subject, another source of powers (2010: 254).

More-than-human agency as it is used in this inquiry

This survey had presented several accounts of the ways in which agency can be conceptualized as a trait of non-humans, and as it manifests through human and non-human relations. The literatures that have been introduced are largely philosophical in nature and they argue for the existence of non-human agency in various forms. It is not the purpose of this thesis to argue for or against the existence of agencies expressed or enacted by more-than-human nature. The task here is to develop a concept that can assist this investigation to understand activists' experiences of non-human nature(s) as actor/actant.

In some respects confusion about more-than-human agency seems to arise from a dissonance between how natural science describes the world and lived experience. For example scientific description of the natural world begins with a division between the non-living (air, water, rocks, etc) and living (further subdivided into animals and plants). Non-living things, therefore cannot exhibit life-like qualities such as agency. But this is not necessarily how humans perceive and experience the world, as Abram demonstrates. Ingold also discusses this in his essay about the experience of the world as animate, because, he argues, experiencing the world as animate has less to do with what a person believes about the world than it has to do with the "condition of being in it" (2011: 67). Put simply, scientific knowledge demands that the world be an object of inquiry (conceptualization) in which the observer is removed from the world, but the knowledge derived from lived experience is gained by being *in* the world (perception).

More-than-human agency, as it is used in this inquiry, describes the experience of perceiving the non-human other or landscape as acting upon

the perceiver. It is the felt experience of the non-human other, an affective experience, which, as the research questions suggest, may influence self-identity, conceptualizations of nature and social action.

CONCLUSION

This inquiry is essentially concerned with understanding the relationships between radical environmental activists, nature and action. I have chosen three sociological concepts that provide an analytical framework to support my inquiry. Each concept carries a range of contested meanings and interpretations. This chapter has provided an overview of the scholarly landscape and define how I employ the concept.

The more I learned about each concept the more it struck me that they seem to form an irreducible triad. While each can stand alone, they inform and complement each other. When discussing nature it is difficult not to discuss identity (it is humans who give nature its cultural and semiotic elements) and more-than-human agency, because it is this concept that mediates between nature and the human subject. Similarly human identity is borne out of nature and may be affected, or so I propose, by the experience of more than-human-agency. Of course, more-than-human agency is only a useful sociological concept when related to nature and human identity. In this sense then, the framework does not create an obviously linear causal relationship; the concepts are tightly bound and the framework triangular in nature. But, I think it is useful, from the perspective of developing a research methodology, to think about the nature-human relationship being mediated by more-than-human agency, which acts as the mechanism to effect activist identity and stimulate social action.

Put simply, the framework conceptualises nature, self-identity and more-than-human agency as relationally and narratively constituted. I appreciate

this a choice that has epistemological ramifications, but it is one that establishes, I think, more inclusive and flexible approaches to understanding the activist experience than frameworks that conceptualised nature and humans in more restricted ways. As Plumwood puts it succinctly, “a world perceived in communicative and narrative terms is certainly far richer and more exciting than the self-enclosed world of meaningless and silent objects exclusionary, monological and commodity thinking creates, reflecting back to us the echo of our own desires” (Plumwood 2002: 230).

Sociology is, according to Weber, “the science whose object is to interpret the meaning of social action and thereby give a causal explanation of the way in which the action proceeds and the effects which it produces” (1922: 7). The three concepts and the way in which I have described them here provide clear signals about the most suitable methodological approach to shed light on the research question. An interpretive approach is warranted, one that is sympathetic to phenomenological and narrative methodologies. This is the subject of the next chapter.

Part II: Research design and experience

Chapter 4 The research approach

Is this not the meaning of research; to question something by going back again and again to the things themselves until that which is put in question begins to reveal something of its essential nature?

van Manen 1990: 43

One learns to see naively and freshly again, to value conscious experience, to respect the evidence of one's senses, and to move toward an intersubjective knowing of things, people and everyday experiences.

Moustakas 1994: 101

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the inquiry's theoretical and methodological influences that will guide the research. Previous chapters have introduced this inquiry and developed a conceptual framework to guide the research into the questions that it poses. The task of this chapter is to outline the research approach. The boundary between this chapter and the previous one is somewhat artificial because the conceptual framework is a necessary part of developing the research framework. Or, as Sartori puts it, "concept formation stands prior to quantification", because concepts are our "data containers," and "the empirical question becomes what turns a concept into a valuable, indeed a valid, fact finding container" (1970: 1038-9).

The research questions and the conceptual framework have already suggested epistemological and theoretical perspectives that will guide the research. These perspectives will be discussed in more detail in this chapter because they are central to the choice of methodologies and methods. The chapter begins with a brief survey of possible approaches to social research into nature-human relations, using five studies as illustrations. The rest of the chapter establishes a research 'string' (Crotty 1998), which explains the relationship between the inquiry's epistemology, theoretical perspectives,

and methodologies. The final part of the string is the research methods. These will be presented in the following chapter.

SOCIAL RESEARCH INTO NATURE-HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

A range of issues were addressed choosing an appropriate methodological approach to answering the research questions. While the choice of research methodology is guided by the research question, I recognise the significance of personal inclinations and biography in the decision making process (for example, Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005: 3-4; Silverman, 2010: 6-7). It is, after all, a source of inspiration and enthusiasm to undertake the research (Moustakas 1994: 59, 104). I am interested in learning about what people think, and much of my professional life has been engaged in working closely with people as they make changes to their lives. A key part of that work has been concerned with conversations and formal interviews with people who are often in crisis and being challenged to change.

I am interested in a 'thick' description of social action that provides context and meaning (Geertz 1973; Denzin 1989; Ezzy 2002; Ponterotto 2006). This inquiry, while concerned with people's responses to environmental issues, is primarily concerned with how people interpret their experiences, that is, how they construct meaning. I read about various quantitative and qualitative approaches, before choosing an appropriate approach. The majority of investigations into meaning making and nature adopt a qualitative research paradigm (although, see for example Clayton's (2003) quantitative study of 'environmental identity'). I will briefly discuss examples of qualitative sociological research before discussing the role of the researcher in research and then describing my qualitative methodological approach.

Having decided that the research question is best suited to qualitative research, there is a plethora of theoretical perspectives and methodologies

from which to choose. Sometimes the approach is apparent from the beginning, bound up in the research question and the researcher's interests. For example, Szerszynski (1993) is interested in how discourses are structured to delineate moral systems in the environmental movement. He adopts a qualitative approach, using loosely structured interviews and discourse analysis, to identify discursive repertoires and structures that established what he describes as the moral foundations of the environmental movement. Szerszynski identifies three ideal-type discourses, 'instrumentalism' (a standpoint that argues decision making about environment should be made rationally on the basis of scientific knowledge); 'expressive environmentalism' (which argues that people's natural inclination to relate peacefully to nature is injured by rational, culturally prescriptive attitudes towards nature); and 'conservative environmentalism' (which is concerned that the loss of traditional social relationships and practices are eroding humanity's relationship with nature). These discourses, he argues, represent the moral discourses of the United Kingdom's environmental movement. They affect environmentalists' moral reasoning and social regulation in that they bind members through particular truth claims, but also set limits upon them. Szerszynski's research interested me because his methodology was concerned with uncovering the environmentalists conceptualisations of self and nature, something that is the subject of this inquiry.

Scarce (2000) explores the social construction and meanings given to nature and salmon by biologists in western North America. He adopts a constructivist epistemological perspective, that argues that knowledge, in this case about nature and the salmon industry, is a social achievement produced and reproduced through social interaction, rather than a straightforward representation of reality (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991). Scarce employs a grounded theory methodology (which undertakes empirical research to inductively generate theories, rather than research to

test propositions deduced from existing theory (Glaser and Strauss 1968; Strauss and Corbin 1990)), utilising historical resources, interviews and participant observation to induce social facts about nature and salmon. Scarce is interested how the idea 'salmon' is constructed. He is particularly concerned with the contested nature of its construction. One of his findings, for example, is that biologists are in a battle for control with their 'managers'.

Scarce's research approach is overtly political in the sense that he exposes the political milieu within which the salmon industry is situated. As Ezzy (2002: 33-4) reminds us, social research is inherently political, not just because it investigates power relationships but also because of its implications for social policy. It will be important therefore, in outlining this inquiry's research methodology, to be clear about its political and ethical dimensions, not so much to refute claims of bias, but to engage constructively with potential audiences.

Morse (2011) is an experienced wilderness guide and outdoor educator. He wants to learn about experiences that participants undertaking wilderness journeys describe as 'meaningful', which he does by accompanying his research subjects on an expedition down the Franklin River in Tasmania. He employs a phenomenological methodology, using the research participants' descriptions of their experience. Morse undertakes a thematic analysis of his data and identifies two experiential themes, which he calls 'humility' and 'being alive to the present', that he argues emphasise the importance of perception in nature-human relations.

Morse's choice of phenomenology is not simply its appropriateness for a research project that seeks to understand people's perception of nature and the meaning making that arises during a wilderness journey; the philosophical approach of phenomenology also fits his intense interest in outdoor education and nature-human interactions (Morse 2011: 60-3). This

study is one with which I developed an immediate rapport, in part because of my own history as an outdoor educator, but also because of Morse's attention to the role of the natural environment in the rafters' experiences.

The final example of qualitative sociological research into nature exemplifies the incorporation of personal experience and ongoing reflection in parallel with a research project. It further illustrates the range of options available to the social researcher and how the personal can become an asset to research, rather than, as an objectivist might argue, a liability. As someone who experiences his doctoral research as, among other things, an apprenticeship in social science research, it can be both unnerving and enthralling to be faced by an array of established research perspectives and methodologies and the thinking behind them. How does one choose and what claims does one make about one's fidelity to a particular approach or renowned practitioner? Crotty's advice is comforting. He recommends that we "devise for ourselves a research process that serves our process best, one that helps us more than any other to answer our research question" (Crotty 1998: 216). Through conversation with established research approaches our relationship changes from simply "plucking one off the shelf...to follow," we are "using established paradigms to delineate and illustrate our own."

This is the approach taken by Shaw (2002) during her doctoral research into the nature-human relationships of people she describes as 'nature carers'. Her research is borne of her love of wild places and her interest in eco-psychology and eco-spirituality. She interviews 'nature carers' about their relationships with nature drawing upon ecofeminist and religious studies traditions. Her insider status establishes an interplay between personal experience and theoretical discourse, both in the methods she uses and the way her dissertation engages constantly in a dialogue (and a merging) between her own accounts of earth/nature experience and her research

findings. She recognises the possible consequences of this for the validity of her findings and writes about “the desire to be in the experience as well as commenting on it” (2002:20). I found her thesis useful because of her interest in nature-human relationships and her employment of interviews that sought stories from her participants, from which she generated thematic findings.

I have chosen the above examples of environmental research undertaken by social scientists, to demonstrate that a range of issues can be considered in choosing one’s research approach. The research question and aims are clearly the main considerations, however, issues such as the researcher’s motivations and experiences will also play a part in choosing a particular methodological approach. Other issues, not illustrated above, but no doubt present, include ethical considerations, the constraints imposed by funding, access to research participants and time available to dedicate to the project. I will now turn to the research approach that have I adopted to pursue this inquiry.

THE RESEARCH APPROACH

This section outlines the inquiry’s approach. It is structured to present as clearly as possible the relationships between epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodologies and methods (although the methods are discussed separately in the next chapter). To achieve this I develop after Crotty (1998) a research string that links epistemology with methods, such that each is informed by and complementary to the other (Table 4.1).

I arrived at the string from both ends; I began this project with an interest in developing further my interviewing skills (method), but I chose narrative interviews following the development of the conceptual framework (and its attendant epistemology) and the realisation that a theoretical perspective and methodologies driven by phenomenology and narrative analysis would

suit the research question. While this section could be read to suggest a coherent, teleological string of research elements, the process of developing the approach was not linear and it continued to be refined during the data collection period.

Table 4.1 Research framework (after Crotty 1998: 5)

| <i>research element</i> | <i>research approach</i> |
|-------------------------|--|
| epistemology | constructionism |
| theoretical perspective | interpretivism: phenomenology, hermeneutics |
| methodologies | phenomenological research, narrative inquiry |
| methods | interviews, observation |

The research questions, and the conceptual framework that I developed to support this inquiry, lend themselves to qualitative methodologies. Qualitative research “is concerned with exploring the understandings, meanings and interpretations that people or other groups attribute to their social world” (Ezzy 2010a: 62). The research questions are concerned with learning about activist’s experiences and the meanings and interpretations that they give to their experiences of the nature they are defending and how these affect their self-identity and action. The conceptual framework signals interpretive and phenomenological theoretical perspectives underpinned by a constructivist epistemology. I will deal first with constructivism and then describe the theoretical perspectives and methodologies that inform the choice of research methods.

CONSTRUCTIONIST EPISTEMOLOGY

The description of qualitative research that I have used above suggests a constructionist epistemological stance, a stance that I have also taken in the conceptual framework. Constructionism holds that “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human

practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted with an essentially social context” (Crotty 1998: 42). Such a stance does not deny the existence of a reality ‘out there’, but it argues that that reality is not meaningful (to the individual and other humans) until humans have imbued it with meaning. For example, I am writing this chapter at the East Alligator Ranger Station in Kakadu National Park, in the Northern Territory of Australia. My house is in a savannah forest on the edge of floodplains, abutting the sandstone tors and outliers of the Arnhemland escarpment. At the moment a tree called the Darwin Woollybutt is in flower. It is the dominant eucalypt here and the forest canopy is filled with constellations of bright orange flowers. When I see this tree I experience its shape, its colours, and its textures, in particular the transition from the rough grey fissured bark trunk to startlingly white upper trunk and branches. But I am also aware of the kinds of concepts that ‘trees’ hold for me and my culture, the predominant one for me in the present heat being its value as a source of shade. The Binning people, the traditional owners of this region, seem to imbue the Darwin Woollybutt with more complex meanings that are integrated into their ecological awareness of, and responsibilities to care for, this place. When Andjalen, as it is called by the traditional owners, is in flower it signals the change in seasons, from Banggerreng, the ‘knock ‘em down season’ when the grasses are blown down by strong winds, to Yegge, the dry season. Flowering announces that it is time to patch burn the country, creating new growth, increasing biodiversity and reducing the risk of damaging wildfires later in the year.

The concept ‘tree’, therefore, is a social product, rooted in time and space, which has historical and cultural sources. This does not affect the physical reality of the tree of course. When I run my hands over its bark, it is there, irrespective of the constructed meanings I attribute to it. There is an apparent tension therefore between a constructionist account of the world

and a realist one. Constructionism is relativist, but to contrast it with realism is a false dichotomy (Crotty 1998: 64). While not denying the existence of material reality, constructionism recognises that the physical laws of nature are overlain, or made meaningful through socio-cultural processes. The implication of this for the social researcher is that “we must participate in the research process with our subjects to ensure we are producing knowledge that is reflective of their reality” (Lincoln et al 2011: 102). This implies, further, that the researcher also becomes an active contributor to the creation of knowledge. Or, in other words, knowledge produced by such research is constructed intersubjectively. I will discuss this issue further in the methods section, but for now I will stress that constructionism recognises that research data is generated with, rather than by, subjects.

For the constructivist researcher the subject’s reality is the reality of everyday lived experience. Constructionism recognises the existence of multiple truths and interpretations of reality. The challenge for the subject reporting their experiences, and the researcher trying to understand them is that unusual experiences are translated and communicated in everyday terms; the subject must, therefore, “interpret the coexistence of this reality [everyday life] with the reality enclaves into which they have ventured” (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991: 40). What does this mean for research such as this inquiry, which is interested in unusual and transformative experiences of nature, and how they are incorporated into the stories people tell about themselves? One implication is that the researcher requires methodologies and method(s) that assist the subject to revisit the original, untranslated experience and retell it with a minimum of distortion. This is not easy of course. Not only is the subject making choices about what and how to describe an experience to themselves, they are also describing it, and portraying an identity, to a researcher whom they probably do not know very well and with whom they must achieve a common understanding. Of

course, this also has implications for the approach taken by researchers if they are to obtain more than a superficial understanding of the subject. I will discuss these issues later, the first when I encounter the problems associated with articulating powerful, personal experiences on the part of the research participants, and the second when I reflect upon my experiences as an interviewer.

Towards a non-anthropocentric standpoint

How well does constructionism suit an inquiry concerned with people who may have an animist or other ontology, which recognises non-human others as active agents and persons in which the gap between the social and nature is unclear or irrelevant? This inquiry needs to be guided by an epistemology that is open to claims participants make about non-humans and their relationship with the non-human environment, one that “insists that the physical realities of the environments in which beliefs are formed are relevant to the ways people know” (Preston 2003: xi).

Constructionism is capable of this, irrespective of any skepticism held by the researcher about their subjects’ ontology. After all, nature is given meaning by humans, “constructivism does seek to demonstrate that the control and power to make nature is within our hands and that the nature that is being made is a product of society, not of the thing itself” (Scarce 2000: 210). The constructivist epistemology does not deny the collaboration of non-humans in meaning making, or the ‘co-construction’ of meaning (Murdoch 2001). Research that explicitly aims to take into consideration non-anthropocentric ontologies is not, in the case of this inquiry at least, an idealist critique of the social sciences or a rejection of constructionism. Rather it is a reminder that as the researcher, I must enter into the inquiry recognising that the research field is not restricted to humans (although they are the only subjects I intend to interview), and the ways in which the research subjects construct meaning may be very different from my own. As

Merleau-Ponty puts it “let us therefore consider ourselves installed among the multitude of things, living beings, symbols, instruments, and men, and let us try to form notions that would enable us to comprehend what happens to us there” (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 160).

I have chosen an established research epistemology that argues that people construct meaningful explanations of their experiences and that this is both an individual and social process. Constructionism recognises that the ‘vocabulary’ that people use is culturally mediated; our voices are in part given to us by our cultural and historical context. The research task is to understand this contextualised meaning-making process. This epistemological approach provides this inquiry with an explanation of how people make knowledge claims that is a good fit with the conceptual framework and the research questions. It provides an analytic with which to obtain and understand the subjects’ knowledge claims, one that recognises that these are social achievements and that findings emerge through the collaboration of the researcher and subjects.

This does not mean however, that I will take a wholly literal approach to the data that is generated. I intend to obtain an account of subjects’ experiences that are, as best as possible, an accurate record of what they *mean* to tell me. But I recognise the tension between accurately reporting what was said and critically analysing interview texts to “shift interpretation beyond the participant utterances to consider the co-constructed, but undocumented, meanings established between the researcher and participant” (White and Drew 2011: 5). This research will, after van Manen (1997: 9) and recognising my own limits, seek to attend to claims made by participants whether they are “real or imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt.”

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND METHODOLOGIES

Having outlined the research epistemology, what are the theoretical perspectives that will most appropriately inform the choice and practice of a research methodology? Two interpretive traditions were chosen, both closely related historically and philosophically, which guide the choice of methodologies and methods. The first, phenomenology, takes the researcher as much as possible to the immediate, lived experience of the research subject and “the meanings that they give to their actions” (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005: 18). The second, hermeneutics, informs the researcher’s analysis and theory development.

Phenomenology

I have sought guidance from the phenomenological research tradition for a number of reasons. Phenomenology is a philosophy with a broad range of methodological approaches and research methods that have influenced other qualitative traditions (Crotty 1998; Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005: 20). It provides a way of investigating the conceptual framework’s identification of the human embedded in and inextricably linked with its world. Phenomenology is underpinned by a philosophy that resonates with my experiential understanding of how people make sense of the world; it is concerned with how people interact with their ‘life-world’. The primacy that phenomenologists such as Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Abram give to direct, embodied experience, and phenomenology’s unitary alternative to the Cartesian concept of consciousness (as a mind independent of the body), conceiving of it instead as active, intersubjective engagement with the world, provide a model to investigate the kinds of nature-human relationships that I have developed in the conceptual framework.

Phenomenology is concerned with describing how the world is experienced by the sensing subject. It describes “as closely as possible the way the world makes itself evident to awareness, the way things first arise in our direct,

sensorial experience” (Abram 1997: 35). Empirically, phenomenology is concerned with obtaining descriptions of experiences so that the researcher can understand what they mean to the individual people who have them and what, collectively, are the essential ‘structures’ of the experiences (Moustakas 1994: 13). It is well suited to inquiring into relationships with nature, because its epistemology - that knowledge claims are derived from an organic relationship with the life-world, including the humans and non-human, that is dynamic and experienced as a dynamic interplay between the body and the world in which it is situated - asks us to attend to phenomena, suspending any presuppositions we may have about their nature or meaning. Foundational concepts of phenomenology that I want to discuss here are intentionality, essences and reduction.

Intentionality

Intentionality, while not unique to phenomenology, makes an important ontological statement. Intentionality, originally used in this form by Brentano and then developed by Husserl and later phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty (Crotty 1998: 44), posits that the person’s consciousness is always actively engaged with things. Mind reaches out to things such that in the process of meaning making ‘subject’ and ‘object’ take on different types of significance; the object of the subject’s attention is engaged in an active interplay - the object is both shaped by the subject’s consciousness but also a participant in the subject’s meaning making (Crotty 1998: 44; Abram 1997).

The concept of intentionality as an expression of the intimacy that one has with the life-world, and as an explanation of human consciousness, assists me to think of my research subjects immersed in a relational field of potentially reciprocal experience. For Abram phenomenology combines extreme rationality and subjectivity into a phenomenal field of sensing subjects who share an awareness of each other and other phenomena, “that

tree bending in the wind, this cliff wall, the cloud drifting overhead: these are not merely subjective; they are *intersubjective* phenomena” (Abram 1997: 38). Intersubjective here speaks to the way meaning arises out of the subject’s engagement with the tree, cliff or cloud and, in this sense it is somewhat different to the meaning making that is formed intersubjectively between two humans encountering each other.

Intentionality argues that meaning making is an achievement of the self and its early emotional responses, judgements and inclinations, and the world (Husserl 1931: 243-4, cited Moustakas 1994: 28). Phenomenology therefore envisages experiential reality as a creative process, or as Merleau-Ponty expressed it, “the phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being” (Merleau-Ponty 1962 [2010]: xxii). The creative nature of a phenomenological insight into human – life-world relationships means that attentiveness to our mind’s reaching out into the world deepens with practice and opens the possibility of transcendent, empathic experience, which “enables us to recognise and affirm our inevitable involvement in that which we observe, our corporeal immersion in the depths of a body much larger than our own” (Abram 1988: 105).

I have provided one such example of this in the introduction where I describe my encounter with a tree. It was an encounter that I think was possible by spending time there and increasing my attentiveness to my surroundings. The consequences of such transcendent and empathic experience may give rise to changes in personal identity and action, or as Abram puts it “For many who have regained a genuine depth perception, recognising their own embodiment as entirely internal to, and thus wholly dependent upon, the vaster body of the Earth, the only possible course of action is to begin planning and working on behalf of the ecological world that they now discern” (Abram 1988: 101).

Phenomenology also resonates with the philosophy originated by Arne Naess, Deep Ecology (Booth 2010: 36-38). As I have mentioned previously, Deep Ecology is an experiential environmental philosophy with an explicit call to political action and is often cited as justifying radical environmentalism (Manes 1990). Phenomenology as a philosophy and research tradition has not surprisingly been taken up enthusiastically by social geographers, in particular by investigators into human-place relationships. An attentive, engaged relationship with place, while crucial to indigenous accounts of identity, is also significant to modern humans (for example, Tuan 1974; Relph 1976).

Phenomenology and culture

So far, this discussion of phenomenology has focussed largely on individual experience and its engagement with its life-world. But phenomenology has relevance to the sociologist because it is also social. While the emphasis is on describing the sensing subject's experience (in contrast with symbolic interactionism, for example, which pays greater attention to linguistic symbols), the individual is inextricably connected to social phenomena as well as 'natural' phenomena; social meaning is a creative achievement arrived at by consensus with other experiencing subjects. In the introduction to this chapter I described the Darwin Woollybutt tree. My experience of that tree is a combination of my sensory perception and the meanings I hold of it (and the possible meanings that I may conjecture (Moustakas 1994: 55)). It is the case, however, that in phenomenology the researcher is encouraged to pay attention to the individual's telling. The danger for the researcher, Merleau-Ponty warns, is to treat the social as an object and privilege it above the individual human subject (1962 [2010]: 422). This is not so much because of a suspicion of culture, but an attitude of naive engagement with experience "not threatened by the customs, beliefs and prejudices of normal science, by the habits of the

natural world or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience” (Moustakas 1994: 41). I will explain this further when the method of ‘reduction’ is introduced.

Phenomenology endeavours to understand, as much as possible, the world prior to cultural overlay. It is not a whole-hearted rejection of culture, rather it is a matter of emphasis. It seeks to appreciate the essence of things, of what they mean at the pre-reflective or pre-rational level. This is, “the core of primary meaning round which the acts of naming and expression take shape” (Merleau-Ponty [1962] 2010: xvii). This approach is relevant to my research because I am interested in a group of people who seem to have developed a distinct culture that contradicts mainstream culture’s understanding of human non-human relations. I want to know about the experiences that give rise to this different formulation because I suspect it may teach us something useful.

This is a political act as well as a critical stance. Phenomenology requires us to question our (culturally inculcated) assumptions about the world and attempt to respond to direct experience, to find the reality rather than be content with the concept of the reality that “has come into being to serve particular interests and will harbour its own form of oppression, manipulation and other forms of injustice” (Crotty 1988: 80-1). This might suggest a conflict with the constructionist epistemology that I have invoked, but that would be a misunderstanding. Phenomenology is not a purely realist project, and it recognises the role of culture in meaning making. What it does is require the researcher to examine the phenomenon under investigation without being prejudiced by their own culturally derived preconceptions of what they will find. This is what I find exciting about phenomenological research: it takes the researcher to the intersection or place where the real and social meet, or where new meaning begins. The phenomenological research process “involves a blending of what is really

present with what is imagined as present from the vantage point of possible meanings” (Moustakas 1994: 27).

Essences

The concept of intentionality explains the way that phenomenology understands how the human becomes conscious of something and makes sense of it. The phenomenologist’s task is to understand this experience or phenomenon. For example, when a person encounters a tree, their perception gives rise to feelings and thoughts that become the phenomenon of experiencing that tree. The researcher is not concerned so much with the factual nature of the experience as they are the “nature of the phenomenon as meaningfully experienced” (van Manen 1990: 40). Understanding is achieved, empirically, through the identification of the phenomenon’s essences, the essential nature “without which it would not be” (van Manen 1997: 177). Essences are the aspects of the phenomenon that give it its quintessential meaning. Experience is interactional: the essence (of a phenomenon) is grounded in the person’s interaction with the world and in the creation of meaning that are shared. In seeking to understand the lived experience of a phenomenon, the researcher, is inquiring into the nature of the interaction and how it is perceived. The essences, which form part of the structure of the phenomenon, become in a sense the objects of the research. This obviously has implications for the analysis of the research data, because the task becomes one of constructing an interpretation of the phenomenon, from necessarily idiosyncratic accounts, that highlights its essential characteristics.

Reduction

But how does the researcher investigate the lived experience of others, second-hand and with language the most available medium of communication (music and art, of course, being alternative forms of

communication)? There are several approaches. A common approach is for the researcher to undertake an auto-ethnography by becoming the research subject; the researcher immerses themselves in the phenomenon seeking direct experience and empathy with their research subjects. The phenomenological approach calls upon the researcher to participate in the exploration at the phenomenological level, engaging empathically with the phenomenon under investigation. Doing this renders it impossible to retain an abstract, observer stance. In my interactions with the research subjects and the nature in which, at least, the forest interviews take place, I recognise myself as an active and animate participant who is reflecting upon his own experiences as well as those of the participants (but different to the level of immersion of the participant observation undertaken by ethnographers). Such personal reflection upon the phenomena being discussed or experienced is unavoidable; rather than being a negative factor in the research, it contributes to the interpretive process (Moustakas 1990: 46) and to the encounters with the ideas that are formulated during the research process.

An essential element of phenomenological practice is called the reduction or *epoche*. The researcher aims to avoid making suppositions and be aware of the cultural system of assumptions, symbols and interpretations that mask direct experience (van Manen 1990: 185; Moustakas 1994: 47; Crotty 1998: 82). The researcher is required to be reflexive about their own assumptions and values and set them aside, a process called 'bracketing', as they investigate the phenomenon. For example, if I were to ask a Binning about the Andjalen (Darwin Woollybutt), my pre-conceived notions of what a tree is and what it can offer might interfere with a Binning explanation of tree as a communicator of information about social practices and ecological processes.

Such an approach, of course, is not unique to phenomenological research and the requirement to be aware of one's own beliefs and values is an essential part of any qualitative social research practice. A phenomenological approach, however, aims to do more than simply report upon the subjects' experiences in an objective fashion (that is, unaffected by the researcher's biases); it is concerned with a reflective and critical stance towards what emerges or arises when attention is paid to the experience itself (Crotty 1998: 82).

This methodological process, during which the phenomenon is examined in isolation from pre-existing interpretations or preconceptions (Denzin 1989: 55), is difficult for two reasons. Bracketing, I have learned, is a skill that requires practice (Moustakas 1994: 90) and I would not suggest that I have begun to master it; it requires a capacity for self-awareness, a high level of ability as an interviewer, and a particular orientation towards the data. The second reason why bracketing is difficult is to do with language and the ways in which the words I choose, and the way I use them, are borne of and within my culture (another consideration of course is the way I respond to my research participants' language). As van Manen (1997) and Crotty (1998) remind us, we can only report to ourselves and others with language. The words and symbols we use, I quickly learned, are dominated by our visual sense. I have previously mentioned that when I am in the mountains I transpose onto the real landscape Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* landscape and the hero's journey (Campbell 1949). I cannot help it, it is there. But, when I shut my eyes I feel more present and my other senses come into play – my visual sense is so dominant, removing it helps me at least at first to try to understand Merleau Ponty's essence of things.

Reduction is a way to the essential character of a phenomenon, but the final stage outlined by Merleau-Ponty, the 'eidetic reduction', is the reconstruction or retelling of the experience to make "reflection emulate the

unreflective life of consciousness” ([1964] 2010: xvii). The end result of the phenomenological approach is a reconstruction or reinterpretation of a phenomenon that seeks to describe its essential character. It is a reconstruction that may seem to have a poetic quality. Indeed, poetry, metaphor and narratives are used in phenomenological writing to assist the reader to *feel* as well as think about the meanings being communicated (van Manen 1990). In part this is an expression of an underlying philosophical attitude that sees what we know as being borne out of cognitive and non-cognitive processes, but it is also recognition of the difficulty articulating experience and meaning. Phenomenological writing, therefore, in addition to being the product of the research, is also part of the methodological approach.

The problem of articulating experience and meaning is one that I faced as a researcher throughout the inquiry. My early interrogations of my own experiences and initial discussions with activists quickly taught me how difficult it is to describe the kinds of experiences that are the subject of this inquiry, particularly in the contrived conversation that is an interview. This issue had important consequences for the choice of a narrative methodology and the ways I went about setting up and conducting interviews. It also has consequences for the way I communicate my material. My goal is to achieve a description of the experience such that it “reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner” (van Manen 1997: 10).

To summarise, this inquiry draws upon phenomenology throughout the research. Phenomenology’s conceptualization of consciousness, of the human’s entanglement with their lifeworld, and its focus upon meaning making, provide an appropriate methodological approach to the investigation of activists’ encounters with nature. Phenomenology is a demanding master. Its critical stance towards culture and the requirement

that the researcher suspend their suppositions about the meanings and explanations of phenomena, in order to be completely receptive to people's experiences, requires a commitment to skill development and reflection. The purpose of the phenomenological methodology is to understand the essential qualities of the phenomena being investigated as it is experienced. The methodology does not finish with the collection of data, however. It provides guidance about how to reflect upon the unique aspects of the phenomena and then communicate them in such a way that they are recognisable to the research subjects and intelligible to other readers.

Hermeneutic theory development

In this inquiry I want to go further than describing authentically the phenomena that are reported by activists about their experiences of nature, because I want to learn about the relationships between such experiences and social practice. Phenomenology is interpretivist: it does not uncover a unitary truth, awaiting discovery by a distant, wholly objective observer. Phenomenological research searches for truths that emerge through the experiences, interpretations and dialectical interplays between researcher and participants. It argues that 'truth' is not unitary, it is manifold and multi-layered. However, I do not take extreme postmodern or constructivist standpoints about the nature of truth, because I find postmodernism's relativism in the former ultimately banal, and find in the latter an explanation of reality that focusses purely on human construction too limited. I seek guidance from a tradition of theory development that is more sympathetic to phenomenology's notion of truth, rather than something that exists in isolation and that is invariable. Purely positivist approaches, notwithstanding their value, do not suffice because phenomenology requires me to immerse myself in the experience – I cannot claim a completely detached objectivity and, while recognising that positivism is found within interpretivist research (Travers 2001: 10), I do not expect my research to generate the kind of data amenable to positivist methods.

Ezzy describes hermeneutics as a compromise between positivism and postmodernism (2002: 23; see also Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005: 27-8). Originally limited to the interpretation of religious texts, contemporary hermeneutics is now used to describe the “art of interpretation generally” (Ezzy 2002: 24). This is not the place to write a history of hermeneutics or discuss differences in hermeneutic traditions (see for example, Crotty 1998), so I will restrict this section to a discussion of how hermeneutics combined with phenomenological inquiry may assist me to interpret the data I collect from activists.

A phenomenological investigation that describes the immediate, pre-rational experience, combined with an hermeneutic approach may seem somewhat paradoxical. However, the interpretation of phenomena by going beyond description, is what gives meaning to the phenomenon and what will lend this research its sociological relevance. After all, lived experience, what phenomenology aims to understand, is always interpreted, because meaning is arrived at through interpretation. Hermeneutics provides a philosophical and methodological approach to interpretation (of, generally, textual data such as interview transcripts) that integrates the literal text within its social and historical setting to uncover deeper meanings than might be achieved through a superficial interpretation. Its philosophical foundations have much in common with phenomenology (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005: 28) and the terms are sometimes conjoined. For example, Heidegger ([1927] 2010: 35) described his approach to the philosophical study of ‘being’ as necessarily phenomenological and that methodologically a phenomenological investigation is hermeneutic (that is, interpretive). Similarly Van Manen (1997) labels his research approach ‘hermeneutic phenomenology’, describing it as an interpretive (hermeneutic) and descriptive (phenomenological) methodology. Hermeneutics provides an interpretive framework and tradition that emphasises the somewhat

contradictory requirements to interrogate the minutiae of experience while holding the whole, the bigger picture, within the same gaze.

The hermeneutic tradition is suited to interpreting people's experiences of nature because, historically, it is versed in the interpretation of texts that arose in cultures distant from today's. Interpreting something strange "that must be made comprehensible, familiar or near through a process of interpretation" (Fisher 2002: 37), seems to describe perfectly the task of interpreting experiences of a nature that seems to contradict the modern socio-scientific sensibility.

A tension within the hermeneutic tradition is concerned with the relative power of the researcher and the participant. Rather than falling into a single camp that privileges the researcher as the interpreter and creator of meaning, or the research participant as the author and authority on what meaning is accepted, I understand this tension as ultimately creative because the dialectic that ensues may give rise to deeper and richer understanding.

Theory development using the hermeneutic approach, is generally described as iterative and circular in nature. The hermeneutic circle for Heidegger ([1927] 2010) recognised that we begin with a presupposition or understanding and develop that further, circling again as, with experience we develop a deepening understanding. The temporal dimension of this circle contributes to the narrative elements of identity explored by Merleau-Ponty ([1962] 2010: 403-4) and Ricoeur (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005: 28).

We have now returned to where we started in this section; meaning is understood as open ended and we continuously deepen our understanding as we travel within a virtuous circle. We are never done. Questions lead to further questions and theories that deepen understanding. This suggests we are never finished, "our interpretations are always somewhat provisional,

somewhat uncertain, and the facts are always somewhat ambiguous” (Ezzy 2002: 165).

THE PROBLEM OF ARTICULATION

So far this chapter has been structured to represent a logical and sequential narrative. As such it is consistent with the majority of social research methodological accounts. In my case at least, this is not a wholly honest account of what happened during the course of my inquiry. My path to a coherent research framework was messier. A key issue that I faced throughout this research is the problem of assisting participants to articulate their experiences. I want to discuss this issue before moving on to outline the final part of the methodological framework, narrative inquiry, because, while obviously consistent with the conceptual framework that explicates a narrative identity, I also found that narrative interviewing could be an effective way of assisting people to articulate their experiences.

Articulating and interpreting experience can be a problem for both researcher and participant. The failure to adequately communicate meaning presents a danger to the validity of interpretive research (Polkinghorne 2007). It seemed that the problem was particularly acute in this inquiry because of the nature of the experiences I was interested in learning about. In part the problem seems to be that such experiences of interactions with non-human nature do not have a readily available vocabulary. Further, as is the case when describing profound, transformative experiences, people seem vulnerable to being rendered inarticulate by the failure of language to express sufficiently the literal scale, depth, profundity or meaning of the experience. Participants would be reduced to words such as ‘awesome’ and would express difficulty describing the experience further. They would also become distracted from the question and move into what I call ‘movement speak’, which I describe in the next chapter.

Awe renders the person speechless because they feel unequal to it, “the notion of an experience that does not immediately yield its meaning is the key to the speechlessness of awe in the face of the natural world” (Nicholson 2002: 17). Such experiences of nature, Scarce claims, “cannot be communicated to other humans without losing the intense reality of the experience” because, “in the act of communicating the knowledge and filling it with meaning, the knowledge - raw experience, really, the most certain of all knowledge - is lost” (Scarce 2000: 195). Scarce argues that such experiences, outside the domain of the social and so difficult to share with others (and create social meaning), are significant sociological phenomena that deserve investigation. (I acknowledge however, that poetry, art and music are ways that people attempt to communicate such experiences.) Another problem faced in the articulation of experience is that the narrator is able to describe only what is available to awareness. Merleau-Ponty uses the analogy of a well to explain that the light of reflection cannot reach the bottom of the well of experience (Merleau-Ponty 1962, cited in Polkinghorne 2007: 41). An implication of this is that the researcher must assist the interviewee to remain with the experience, in the hope that further reflection will make available to their awareness.

The phenomenological approach has already been raised as a way of gaining insight into experiences that do are not amenable to a literal description. Van Manen argues that seeking anecdotes is a valuable methodological device “to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us” (1997: 116). Early in my research I made the decision to seek stories in the hope that they might provide a way around the barrier imposed by the failure to provide a literal description. Telling stories to a receptive listener seemed to ‘free up’ the participant somewhat. I found serendipitously, and later through reading, that it is a central attribute of narrative inquiry.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Definitions of narratives range from short stories told in answer to a question that have a topic and a temporal dimension, to a biography or autobiography (Riessman 2002a: 230-1, 2008: 5-6). The story is a valuable object of research, and the “student of social life, no matter of which domain, needs to become interested in narrative as a form of knowledge, a form of social life, and a form of communication” (Czarniawska 2004: 650). In this section I will discuss how narrative inquiry can assist me to gain insight into the nature of activist – nature experiences and their effects upon activist identities.

The use of narrative inquiry might at first seem to contradict my earlier discussion about the guidance that I have sought from phenomenology. Phenomenology is concerned with capturing and reproducing the immediacy of felt experience, whereas the narrative is a retelling of that experience, presented in narrative. Narratives told during interviews, have a second hand feel and are non-natural data, compared with the data collected by the ethnographic researcher through direct observation, or the personal reflections of a research participant immediately after a particular experience (Silverman 2010: 131-2). While these methods are all representations, narratives are (re)constructed interpretations of events that may or may not be accurate and may be told with a variety of motivations. Further, their meaning may also change depending upon the nature of the interaction between participant and researcher/audience. But, it is the act of telling stories that provides the researcher with a way of understanding the meaning making processes in which participants are engaged. This is because, while the experience itself is obviously significant, it is what the person makes of the experience that is the real subject of this investigation.

There is no need here to repeat the conceptual framework’s development of a moral identity constructed and practiced through narrative. Neither is it

necessary to provide an account of the history and elements of narrative inquiry because it is an established tradition with a vibrant literature. The so-called 'narrative turn' has led to recognition of ways of interviewing that recognise that people relate meaning through stories (Riessman 2002b: 695-6). The narrative inquirer then, collects narratives, and it is the analysis of extended stories that distinguishes narrative inquiry from other interview based methodologies, which isolate and code excerpts of stories, such as grounded theory and ethnography (Riessman 2008: 12).

The value of the narrative approach in this inquiry is that it will provide rich data about activists' experiences and how they present themselves as individuals and groups. The collection of narratives from activists creates data that can be analysed hermeneutically to identify patterns, themes or plots (Polkinghorne 1988: 177). I intend to analyse stories thematically, seeking to understand patterns and develop themes that represent the experiences of defending nature.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has established the epistemological, theoretical and methodological research perspectives that will guide the inquiry. A qualitative approach has been chosen, influenced by phenomenology, hermeneutics and narrative inquiry, to obtain from research participants stories about their experiences of the nature they were defending. These different levels of research design have been presented to demonstrate a coherent relationship between the research questions and the choice of a qualitative approach. Crotty's research string (Table 4.1) has been used to connect epistemological standpoint to the methodologies that will be used. Having identified and outlined appropriate methodologies, the next step in the research design is to choose methods. This chapter has anticipated that narrative interviews will be the central method. The next part will describe the methods and their implementation.

Chapter 5 Method and experience

The empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience.

Moustakas 1994: 13

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined the theoretical and methodological perspectives that have informed this inquiry. This chapter will describe how the research was undertaken. It is an account of the methods used and the research experience. There were many challenges experienced developing and implementing the research methods. I was conscious of the ethical demands of conducting phenomenological and narrative research. This was the case during the research design, interviewing and analysis. Consequently this chapter gives extensive attention to the ethical issues that were faced during the inquiry.

ETHICAL ISSUES AND FORMAL ETHICS APPROVAL

If the purpose of social science is to contribute to social improvement, and certainly my aim through this research is to make findings that are socially useful, then ethical considerations must be taken into account throughout the design, research and writing stages. Israel and Hay, citing examples of negative outcomes for research participants and their communities, stress that self-interested research, with “little apparent regard to the sensitivities of those people...is clearly antithetical to the emancipatory aspirations of social science” (Israel and Hay 2006: 3). Throughout this inquiry, I was forced to reflect upon the ethical implications and consequences of my research design and actions. A wide range of ethical issues, dilemmas and responses are found in the literature. Many of these were addressed in the

research design and ethics approval application, which received Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee approval on 25 October 2010. Ethical issues that arose included legal issues, risks and benefits to the participants, and risks to the researcher(s). I needed to approach these issues as ways of doing research, and building effective relationships with activists, rather than as barriers to be overcome. I will limit my discussion here to issues that I felt required particular attention.

Legal issues

The choice of radical environmental activists as a research subject presented ethical concerns for the Human Research Ethics Committee about the potentially illegal nature of their protest activities and the possible consequences of my involvement in illegal actions or receipt of information about illegal actions. Radical environmental activists are willing to behave unlawfully by for example, trespassing, obstructing and resisting police directions and damaging property. They may be subject to ongoing court actions or court orders as a consequence of previous illegal activities. The Committee required me to obtain legal advice because it was concerned that my proposed research would create legal risks for the university and myself, should I become involved in any illegal protest actions, or publish information that is *sub judice* or in contempt of court. Achieving a balance between my desire to undertake in-depth research into a population that may be involved in lawbreaking, and managing the ethical, legal and practical risks that are inherent in such research contributed to an enhanced focus on ethical interactions with potential research subjects. As an inexperienced social researcher I found the HREC process an important learning experience as I learned to navigate the bureaucratic and ethical tensions that exist in such research.

Risks and benefits to the participants

The activists I wanted to interview, particularly the forest activists, are understandably secretive about their activities and communities. I was conscious that I was asking interviewees to give me their time and expose themselves. I was also aware that they (and the forest activists in particular) are frequently portrayed negatively in the media. I was also aware that they might be suspicious of me as an outsider and a person who has previously worked in the criminal justice system, given the extent of negative reporting and a history of infiltration of radical activist groups by law enforcement agencies. Trust building, therefore, would be a key part of recruiting participants. I considered it ethically important to explain to potential participants that this inquiry was unlikely to provide significant tangible benefits, in the short term at least. It would, however, document the views, ideas and meanings that the participants attach to their activism and this may be seen as a worthwhile exercise and an opportunity to, among other things, explain why they do the things they do. It was also ethically important to ensure potential participants had sufficient information about the research study to be able to decide competently whether or not the risks and benefits of participating were acceptable.

Potential participants may be concerned that there are risks that may arise from participating because the information they provide could be used for law enforcement purposes in relation to the participant or another activist. I explained that the research is not concerned with obtaining details of illegal activities and that I was not working on behalf of, or associated with, a law enforcement agency. I also advised participants that references in interview transcripts and the final thesis, to a specific event where anonymity was at risk would have identifying details removed, to ensure the anonymity of the participant and other people who are mentioned during interviews.

I quickly recognised that I would be unlikely to recruit participants unless the potential participants trust that information about illegal activities would be kept in confidence. Maintaining strict confidentiality is an important ethical principle and duty to the participants. I informed all potential participants that I would ensure the confidentiality of the information they provided. I also assured them that I would use pseudonyms and not retain identifying information about the participant, beyond the data collection phase (that is, the period between contacting the activist and finalising the interview transcript). The issue of confidentiality was raised by several participants who were concerned that they might be identified. Sometimes the concern was that they might be identified by other activists because some of the subject matter in the interviews was about issues that were not normally discussed, and they did not want to look like a 'hippy'. (Nicholson (2002: 11) describes the reluctance to discuss love of nature as a taboo subject. It seems to be related to the professionalization of contemporary activism and the desire not to be denigrated by colleagues, media or other protagonists. I also wonder if the reluctance to discuss this aspect of the activist experience is a reason why activist relationships with nature have not received much attention.) I explained that I would use a pseudonym for all interview participants, and that identifying material would not be retained by the investigators beyond the time needed to establish contact with the participant and finalise the interview transcript. I also offered participants copies of interview transcripts so they could remove or edit any parts about which they were concerned.

An ethical issue potentially arises in a situation where I believe I have a responsibility to act to prevent harm to other individuals. This means that I am ethically obliged to breach participant confidentiality if I receive information that indicates that other people will be harmed. I addressed this issue by advising potential participants during information sessions,

and on the Consent Form, that all information provided by participants, including their identities and the identities of other activists, will be held in confidence, except for information that leads me to become concerned about the safety of another individual. I advised that in such a situation I would contact a relevant authority such as the Tasmania Police Service. All interview participants accepted this limit. I did not receive information that created an ethical conflict.

A sub-set of participants who are at risk of being identified in the data is the leading figures of activist organisations and networks that I interviewed, and there remains a possibility that a well informed reader could identify them. I did not expect this to be a significant risk for these people because they already have a public media profile. I, in consultation with my supervisor, considered that the key issue is that they make an informed decision and indicate their preferred level of anonymity. I discussed this risk with participants prior to their participation in the study. I have also offered those participants who were concerned with potentially identifying material an opportunity to read relevant parts of the draft thesis before its completion.

Radical environmental activism takes place within an emotionally charged space. Activists may find witnessing the destruction of the species/habitats they are trying to protect emotionally distressing (and this may be a source of passion or commitment to their activism). Confrontations with people such as foresters, whalers and police may also be emotionally challenging. It was possible, therefore, that the research interviews could cause distress to participants by recalling painful memories. I designed the research to be conducted in such a way that it does not inconvenience or cause distress to participants. I am also an experienced interviewer and counsellor, having worked in the human services field for over twenty five years. I advised all potential participants about the nature and content of interviews and that

they could stop the interview at any time. Interviews return the participant to past experiences and ask them to reflect upon them. The researcher is involved in a process that can change people, it “affects the persons being interviewed and leaves them knowing things about themselves that they didn’t know – or at least were not fully aware of – before the interview” (Patton 2002: 405). There were several interviews that were very emotional for the participant and for myself and it was clear that the experiences of losing campaigns, trees and seeing whale carcasses were profoundly emotional, akin, some participants reported to the death of a family member or friend. While it was not the purpose of the interview, several participants informed me that the interview had been a positive experience because it had provided an opportunity to reflect upon their experiences, their activism and the person they had become.

Risks to the researcher

I identified, in consultation with my supervisor, potential risks undertaking the inquiry. A key risk was concerned with becoming involved in illegal actions and has already been discussed. The second was that the research could take me into relatively remote settings. This of course is a risk that the activists themselves undertake as a matter of course, but the ethics approval process required my to undertake a form of occupational risk assessment. I am an experienced mountaineer and bushwalker, with current advanced first aid qualifications. This gave me the skills to confidently assess risks and manage them while undertaking field visits and conducting interviews. I conducted one interview in a tree-sit 65m above ground, the only access being a climbing rope.

A further risk that was discussed was the possibility the inquiry might be criticised by people who were concerned that it has an underlying political motive to advocate for or attempt to legitimise radical environmental activists and the strategies they use, with the consequence that the study’s

objectivity would, therefore, be compromised. Critics might, for example, claim the inquiry is not objective because it does not seek to include foresters or whalers as research participants. Alternatively, they might argue that I had conflicts of interest by virtue of my involvement in environmentalism and activism. I argued to the Human Research Ethics Committee that the first issue can be addressed by explaining that people who engage in unusual or illegal activities are often the subject of sociological and criminological research and that this does not mean that the researchers condone the tactics or behaviours they employ. I would agree that similar studies into foresters and whalers would be interesting, but that the research questions on which this study is based will not be answered by seeking to undertake a comparative study. I also noted that the Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies, within my university, was also supervising a PhD candidate who is researching radical environmental activism from a policing perspective.

With respect to the second issue, I did not consider that this presented a significant ethical risk to the investigators, participants or the university. However, I recognised that all sorts of claims are made by protagonists in such intensely political and emotionally charged arenas. I advised the Committee I did not hold any conflicts of interest in relation to the potential participants or their organisations and networks. I was not a member of the Sea Shepherd Society, the Huon Environment Centre or Still Wild Still Threatened and I did not have relationships with radical environmental activists involved in forest or whaling campaigns.

I am a member of several environmental organisations. Of these, the only one that engages in environmental activism is the Wilderness Society and I have participated in protests that it has organised. The Wilderness Society is a mainstream environmental organisation and which does not recommend its members to undertake illegal activities. Some study

participants might also be members of the Wilderness Society, but this was not considered to present a conflict of interest.

DATA COLLECTION

Interviews with activists were my primary method of data collection. I also gathered material from websites and blogs, media and an activist zine (a self-published magazine). I found a forest activist's blog particularly useful. Miranda Gibson established a tree-sit in the Styx valley in December 2011 and remained in the sit at the time of writing. The following quotation written on her 258th day in the tree is one of several examples that represent the concepts of nature, identity and more than human agency, and their relationship with activism, that are at the heart of this inquiry:

and as I watched in awe at the magic of snow I had this feeling. Like a sudden strengthening of spirit, a hardening of courage, an uplifting of hope. It's hard to describe, but I guess it is all that and more, mixed together. "This...." I thought to myself, watching the snow fall. "This is why I keep fighting." I knew that it was true. That in the incomprehensible beauty of that moment was the very essence of why I am in this tree and will keep on fighting for these forests. And I felt like I would carry this moment with me for the rest of my life, as a reminder of why I fight. Not just for this forest, but for everything... for all the big and small struggles I will face in my life, for all the times when I will be faced with the opportunity/responsibility to do something to make the world a better place. I will remember this moment. And the hope that comes from the innocent and uncorrupted beauty of the natural world (Gibson 2012).

Such forms of data collection, while not central to the inquiry methodology, provide a method of context setting and triangulation (Silverman 2010: 133-4).

PARTICIPANT SAMPLING AND RECRUITMENT

Having established a definition of radical environmental activists, I needed to recruit activists to interview. The phenomenological nature of the conceptual and methodological frameworks suggested that suitable research participants would be activists currently engaged in direct action protests and in contact with the nature they are defending. My focus in choosing participants was the likelihood that they could provide material relevant to the inquiry's key concepts because they met these criteria. I was keen to interview activists whose experience was ongoing, or recent, to increase the likelihood that I would receive stories that had not been given time for rehearsal or re-working or incorporation into a life narrative that occurred years ago. I wanted raw, un-rationalised experience (or, in other words, I wanted to participate in if possible the activist's interpretation of their experience). This excluded, for example, environmentalists not currently engaged in direct action who had been involved in earlier campaigns.

I decided to sample two activist groups: forest activists involved in protests in Tasmania's Florentine, Styx and Weld forests and Sea Shepherd Conservation Society campaigners who were aboard the *Bob Barker* upon their return to Hobart, Tasmania from a campaign in the Southern Ocean. Participant recruitment, especially the recruitment of forest activists, was challenging at times. The participants I was seeking to interview lead busy lives and are often engaged in active campaigning. With respect to Sea Shepherd activists I had brief windows of opportunity when their vessel was moored in Hobart, upon its return from the Southern Ocean.

I adopted purposeful sampling, in particular snowball sampling and opportunistic/emergent sampling (Patton 2002; Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005) to recruit interview participants. I made several visits to the Florentine protest camp and the *Bob Barker* to describe my inquiry and make myself familiar to activists. I decided that using a snowballing technique (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005: 47) would be undertaken by first interviewing leading radical activists in their relevant organisations/networks. I would then ask them to recommend other activists within their organisation/network who they identify as 'radical'. The criteria used to select additional participants would be that the potential participant identifies as 'radical' and is endorsed by previously interviewed members of the organisation or network. I would then ask them to recommend other activists. This technique worked well with the Sea Shepherd activists. I was less successful recruiting forest activists, in part I think because the forest activists were very busy, often involved in campaigns and difficult to access. I made many visits to the Florentine Forest, about two hours away from the University of Tasmania seeking to recruit participants. I also engaged in lengthy email conversations, which were punctuated by quiet periods while people were campaigning.

Activists were provided with an information sheet and consent form prior to interview. I discussed both forms with the participants at the beginning of each interview. I invested time in establishing relationships prior to interview. The most effective way of recruiting participants was to rely upon the goodwill of participants who contacted other activists and recommended that they agree to be interviewed.

Sample size

Twenty two activists were interviewed; eleven forest activists and eleven whale activists. Two factors were involved in determining the number of participants. The first was theoretical and the second practical. Determining

when enough people have been interviewed depends upon the research question and methodology. In this case the inquiry is not seeking to establish results or analyses that are statistically representative; its main purpose is to gather sufficient material to fully describe the phenomenon of nature-activist interaction through a qualitative inquiry. Theoretical saturation is a concept used in naturalistic inquiry to decide when sufficient data has been collected to describe fully the concepts that are being investigated. It is “the point at which no new insights are obtained, no new themes are identified, and no issues arise regarding a category of data” (Bowen 2008: 140, citing Strauss and Corbin 1990). While the concept has specific meaning in grounded theory development, it is arguably a useful concept in other forms of theory building such as hermeneutics. Deciding when enough participants have been interviewed is a key research decision that affects both the validity of the research itself and its analytical value. For the inexperienced researcher, this is additionally challenging (Bowen 2008) and relies upon their observational and analytical ability to recognise they have the information they require (Patton 2002: 245). I ceased interviewing when I decided that I had enough overlapping information and that my interviews had examined the phenomenon from sufficient angles. This was achieved through reviewing field notes and transcripts, adapting interviews, developing new lines of inquiry and asking new questions.

There were also practical considerations at play in making this decision. I have already described the difficulties recruiting participants. While the number of participants from each case is the same and has an aesthetically pleasing balance, these numbers also represent a sizeable proportion of the available population of potential participants. With respect to Sea Shepherd activists I decided I had achieved saturation before I completed my eleventh interview. I am confident I could have obtained new material from forest activists, but I became constrained by the amount of time that I had available to complete the inquiry and had to stop at the eleventh interview,

which was undertaken a couple of weeks after my last Sea Shepherd interview and shortly before I moved interstate for six months.

THE PARTICIPANTS

I interviewed 22 people between March 2011 and April 2012. I collected basic demographic details at interview, some of which have been presented in Table 5.1. It is not the purpose of this inquiry to reduce the participants to a simplistic set of categories; however, the table does assist the reader to develop a picture of the people who agreed to participate in interviews. The participants were extraordinary individuals, with diverse biographies and motivations; they deserve far greater attention than they receive in this thesis. I collected a significant amount of material during interviews on a range of topics (for example, about their early contact with nature), which I have not used, but which would benefit from further exploration.

The participants are presented in Table 5.1 in the order they were interviewed, using the pseudonyms by which they are referred throughout the thesis. Eleven are forest activists and eleven are Sea Shepherd activists. One activist has participated in forest and whaling campaigns. All were actively engaged in radical environmental activism at the time. I have not presented all the categories for which data was collected, because some, such as state of origin and nationality, might identify the participant. The participants ranged in age from 21 to 54 years old (although the majority, 20, were aged between 21 and 33 years) at the time of interview. Eleven are male and eleven are female. The majority are Australian, live in Tasmania, are middle class, white, and do not have children (although three have children), full-time employment or own their own home. The majority are well educated and 17 participants have completed or part-completed a tertiary level qualification.

Table 5.1 Participant characteristics at time of interview, in the order of interview. (Pseudonyms are used. Education level means completed or part-completed.)

| <i>name</i> | <i>forest/ocean</i> | <i>gender</i> | <i>age</i> | <i>education</i> |
|-------------|---------------------|---------------|------------|------------------|
| Oliver | ocean | male | 31 | tertiary |
| Ruby | ocean | female | 26 | tertiary |
| Mia | forest | female | 27 | tertiary |
| Ava | forest | female | 39 | secondary |
| Lucas | forest | male | 26 | tertiary |
| Will | forest | male | 39 | tertiary |
| Charlotte | forest | female | 22 | TAFE |
| Dan | forest | male | 27 | tertiary |
| Sophie | forest | female | 27 | TAFE |
| Sam | forest | male | 24 | tertiary |
| Pete | forest | male | 28 | tertiary |
| Helen | ocean | female | 23 | tertiary |
| Ethan | ocean | male | 23 | tertiary |
| Thomas | ocean | male | 23 | TAFE |
| Ella | ocean | female | 23 | tertiary |
| Henry | ocean | male | 21 | secondary |
| Chloe | ocean | female | 28 | tertiary |
| Isabella | ocean | female | 30 | tertiary |
| Jack | ocean | male | 24 | tertiary |
| Riley | ocean | male | 54 | tertiary |
| Matilda | forest | female | 33 | tertiary |
| Emily | forest | female | 30 | tertiary |

THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

An interview schedule was developed to guide the participant interviews. The schedule was designed to assist me to manage the interview trajectory in terms of its content and our relationship. It begins with biographical questions that were designed to capture personal details such as age and educational background. The early questions were also designed to assist

the participant to ease into the interview relationship. Initial discussions with activists revealed that the kinds of stories I was seeking were deeply personal and that there could be some resistance to sharing them because they did not want to present themselves as irrational or, to use their idiom, 'hippy', and because they had not thought deeply about the topics before the interview. The participants needed time to become used to the interview process and to focus on and deepen their reflection about the issues I was exploring.

In some respects the draft interview schedule was a catch all, a way of covering as much ground as possible and testing different approaches to learn whether or not they gained access to relevant data. The Human Research Ethics Committee was alerted in my research ethics application that the interview schedule would be reviewed after the first few interviews and that any changes would be minor and would not increase the burden, or work expected of participants. The original schedule was reviewed after the first three interviews. Minor changes were made by removing a question about the participant's family status and adding some sample questions that had worked in the first interviews. I added to the schedule the key concepts I was exploring to remind me to remain focused on them and not allow the interview to digress. These adjustments represent an early stage in the analysis process, refining my search for the material that is relevant to the inquiry.

The revised schedule, which was used for all subsequent interviews had the following subject headings:

- welcome
- participant background information
- creating a chronology
- early experiences of nature
- stories about becoming a Sea Shepherd/forest activist

- what it means to be an activist
- the meaning of nature
- connection with nature
- the agency of nature
- moral obligation to nature
- the activist's future
- interview finalisation

Some headings had introductory sentences that I used to introduce the topic. I did not use the topic headings themselves in the interviews. They were there for my guidance and I did not want to lead the interview participant so directly. Often themes emerged naturally and I could refer to the schedule to remind myself what it was I was trying to elicit from the participant. I also did not think it useful to use sociological terms with which the participant may not be familiar. For example, I did not mention the word agency during my interviews but explained I wanted to learn about experiences that the participant may have had of nature being active or working upon them in some way. Participants were not expected to be experienced interviewees or acquainted with qualitative research methodologies such as phenomenology or narrative inquiry. They were informed, however, that I was seeking stories to illustrate their experiences.

THE INTERVIEWS

The interviews were guided by a phenomenological and narrative approach, in which the extended interview was the primary method of gathering data with which to explore the research question. Each interview was a crucial event in the research process because a poorly conducted interview might fail to obtain useful data, might be a negative experience for the participant and might reduce my chances of recruiting further participants. The extended interview (or in-depth and long interview) is the typical method of learning about first-hand experience (Moustakas 1994: 114). I combined the

typical extended interview approach, using a schedule to guide the conversation and seek non-narrative answers. I followed up on interesting information by asking participants to describe experiences or explain something by way of stories. The interview schedule was adapted during the data collection period in light of the kinds of information and stories I was receiving and as I became more confident about the key concepts.

Narrative interviewing as research method places significant demands upon the researcher. It is more complex than a questionnaire-driven interview, because it requires the researcher to be able to follow the participant's lead and to obtain their stories. In this sense, while themes may be developed in an interview schedule to structure and guide the interview, the researcher must be prepared to go where the stories take them (Chase 2011: 421). I developed a comprehensive schedule that guided me through the interview. This meant that most interviews had similar trajectories; an early period of basic information gathering, trust building and acclimatisation to the interview, followed by a period of more detailed inquiry and exploration, until the participant or I began the process of interview closure. Often the activist would only begin giving the stories I was seeking towards the end of the interview; sometimes it came in a flood as if a wall had burst and the participant became genuinely excited about the topic. On one occasion our efforts to end the interview were constantly interrupted by another story or idea that must be told.

The interview is a collaborative accomplishment (or 'conversational partnership' Rubin and Rubin 2005) in which researcher and participant "creatively and openly share experiences with one another in a mutual search for greater self-understanding" (Denzin 1989: 43). The researcher, however, must focus upon the subject matter and guide the participant through the interview. Or, as van Manen writes, "the art of the researcher in the hermeneutic interview is to keep the question (of the meaning of the

phenomenon) open, to keep himself or herself and the interviewee oriented to the substance of the thing being questioned” (1990: 98). It is an experience that can be mentally and emotionally demanding of both interviewer and participant. Most of us are familiar with story telling and hearing, however, telling stories about deeply felt or meaningful events, with the performance issues that are attendant in interviewing conditions is challenging.

I generally interviewed with an appreciative and positive style to encourage the interviewee, and there were many occasions when the participant and I would laugh at something. There were also many occasions when we discussed distressing topics, such as the destruction of coupes, a particular tree, or the slaughtering of whales. Several participants cried during interviews; I witnessed a wide range of emotions in the participants and myself. Indeed, the narrative interview, I discovered, is an intense meeting between two people, who despite being strangers, find themselves in a surprisingly intimate situation. Successful interviews were achieved, I think, through a combination of good listening, good questioning and self-revealing, but more importantly, it was the emotional qualities of the interaction that achieved a successful interview. I managed this in part by being clear about the person I was. I therefore told stories about myself and about my own experiences of nature as a way of both revealing the way I ticked but also inviting the participant to give stories about their experiences of nature. This was extremely important I learned, not just for rapport building, but because it was clear that nature relationships and experiences seemed to be a kind of taboo subject for the forest activists in particular. In one interview, for example, I realised I was including the tree the participant was talking about in the conversation (I would refer to it and pat it). This might seem amusing post interview, but was a perfectly natural thing to do at the time.

Interviewing then, can be an intimate experience (Johnson 2002: 104). While the interviewer is constantly conscious of managing the interview, they are also embedded within it; it is not possible to achieve the kind of objectivity, or emotional distance that characterise other forms of data collection. This is not natural data (Silverman 2010); it is constructed by participant and researcher. Some of the most powerful interviews that I undertook, upon reflection, were very intimate. The giving and receiving, the vulnerability, the intertwining, the emotional range, care and growth that seemed to occur during the interaction was quite extraordinary. Such communion and “openness to the Other”, Ezzy (2010b: 168) writes, “is a gift – it allows Self to be transformed through recognising and validating the Other.” This is an achievement by which “not only the interviewee’s cognitively articulated sense of self, and the story they tell, that is co-created, but it is also the emotional framing of the story that is co-created, shaped by the emotional stances of the interviewer and the interviewee” (2010b: 168). Such interactions require emotional and ethical maturity as well as a deeply reflexive approach to the research.

While the structure of each interview was guided by the interview schedule, it was the emotional and relational trajectory that required greatest attention. My field notes of an early interview, for example, contain a reminder to take greater care ending the interview. On that occasion I terminated the interview without appreciating the emotional effort that it had required of the participant. I paid greater attention to this in future interviews and gave more time to the processes of interview completion and parting.

Interviews that are seeking deeply personal information are, I learned, a sophisticated interactional exercise, requiring a high level of sensitivity and mindfulness. They are also ethically charged encounters that require an ethical approach throughout the researcher’s engagement with the

participant (Kvale 2006; Josselson 2007). Interviewing entails an ongoing reflexive practice that incorporates attention to ethical issues before and as they arise (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). Issues such as briefing and information, consent, power, the degree to which one challenges the participant, or seeks to dig deeper into difficult areas, confidentiality and anonymity are just examples of the many issues that require an ethical approach. Using the metaphor of the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood, Kvale cautions researchers (and participants) of the abuses of participants that can occur as a result of the information that is revealed “There are many kinds of wolves. Today, we could perhaps include some interviewers who, through their gentle, warm, and caring approaches, may efficiently circumvent the interviewee’s defenses to strangers and invade their private worlds” (2006: 498).

On several occasions participants commented that they did not intend to tell me something that they had just told me a story about. I did not understand this telling as some kind of victory, but as a gift and privilege which I must handle carefully. I made sure that interviewees knew that anything that they wanted deleted from the final transcript would be. I also found that several participants found the interviews useful because they were asked to think about aspects of their activism that they had not previously considered deeply. Often traumatic issues arose, particularly grief at the loss of a tree or forest. This required enormous sensitivity. One activist wrote in an email after their interview, “I would also like to thank you for your time and energy that you are putting into this...I hope I didn’t treat you too much like a counsellor, but it’s impossible to talk about that stuff and not have associated sadness/trauma arise.”

Interviewing of this kind, I learned, gave rise to a strong feeling of moral obligation to the participants. In some ways this created a burden: I am anxious about doing them justice. Such feelings, van Manen (1990: 98)

notes are not unusual and provide a preventive against participant exploitation.

Interviews generally lasted between 40 minutes to two hours. Sometimes interviews were done in parts, with breaks or on separate days. The location of the interview was an important consideration because I wanted participants to be as relaxed and comfortable as possible. All Sea Shepherd interviews were undertaken on the *Bob Barker*, the activist's accommodation while they were in Hobart. My preference for the forest activists was to undertake interviews in a bush setting to provide a focus upon nature and more than human agency. One interview took place in a tree-sit, but the majority of interviews were held away from the contested areas and occurred in my university office, the university grounds, the Botanic Gardens, Hobart's waterfront, the Huon Environment Centre, or the activist's home or garden. I interviewed one participant in a cafe at her request. I felt self-conscious in the cafe and aware that other people might be listening. This affected negatively the quality of my interviewing, and possibly the frankness of her responses.

I purposefully avoided asking questions that used academic language unless the participant used it. For example, only two participants mentioned the environmental philosophy of Deep Ecology. While I explained prior to beginning the interview that I was interested in the concept of more than human agency, I described it as nature acting upon us. I did not do this to patronise participants, but because I was seeking *their* interpretations of experiences rather than recording their ability to give me the answers they thought I wanted.

Interviews were recorded digitally. I emailed transcripts to participants informing them that, as discussed prior to interview, they were welcome to submit any corrections or changes before I analysed the transcript.

MOVEMENTSPEAK

I became aware of a phenomenon that occurred during all interviews, when the participant would appear to struggle to provide an answer and digress into what I call ‘movementspeak’. Movementspeak is what the participants seemed to do when they were losing the thread of their answer, or the question was too difficult (sometimes it was too difficult at that stage in the interview). They would digress or change subject and start talking about why they engage in activism. They might give a description of the state of the environment, a political statement about the need for activism, or a justification of the particular activities of their activist network. Often they would finish talking and ask me what was the original question (what Riessman (2002b: 695) calls “exit talk”).

Several participants made similar movementspeak and it often sounded like an automatic download from their activist organisation’s printed material, training or culture. This is no criticism. I formed the opinion that movementspeak was not usually a consciously overt attempt to evade answering a question, but more likely it was an expression of participant’s desire to be generous and keep talking. I also wondered if participants moved into movementspeak because this was such familiar ground, ground they had covered in previous interviews, compared with the questions I was asking, which covered subject matter they hadn’t necessarily reflected upon themselves prior to interview, that were more difficult to articulate, or that they were not ready to reveal. Frequently the participant would acknowledge that they had digressed and apologise and, or ask for assistance to get back on track.

I learned not to interrupt movementspeak, understanding it as an essential part of the flow of the conversation. The skill I needed to develop was how to frame questions that were easier to answer, or delay them until my relationship with the participant had developed sufficiently to be able to ask

the question successfully. I observed that the most useful information would be elicited in the latter stages of the interview; it was clear that the participant needed time to reflect and tune in to the kinds of questions that I was asking.

UNEXPECTED FINDINGS DURING INTERVIEWS

I recorded several things during interviews and field trips that were unexpected. The most important finding, one that I was naïve not to expect, was the importance of being in community with other activists. Almost every participant mentioned this as a factor in their experiences of activism. This, of course, is consistent with the social movement literature about environmental and other activists and I should have expected it (see, for example, Doyle 2000; Ricketts 2003). For some people it was the primary factor in their ongoing participation in direct action activism. Several participants told me their decision to join a direct action group or campaign had been in part because they had always been different, and for the first time had encountered people who thought about the world in similar ways as them.

I also found that almost every participant was reluctant to discuss a spiritual relationship with nature (although most activists said that their nature relationship had a spiritual dimension) or identify it as such. This was surprising because my readings of campaigns in the 1990s indicated the significance of spiritual beliefs and practices (Taylor 2001a and 2001b). However, Taylor also notes the personal nature of spiritual beliefs and practices, and ambivalence about the beliefs and practices of others (Taylor 2001a: 185-6). This was reflected in responses to my questions about spiritual matters.

Related to the above issue, I think, was the taboo that appeared to part of the activists' culture was open discussion of relationships with inanimate

individuals such as trees. This may reflect beliefs that activists should not be 'hippies'. One participant told me, "I hug the tree, I touch it. But yeah, we battle that as a stereotype, because it's hippy." The label 'hippy' was used pejoratively by several participants. Another told me, "The kind of experiences that I'm talking to you about I would not talk about to activists unless they were friends." Having hippy beliefs seems to render an activist foolish or unprofessional, and therefore someone who would not be taken seriously by other activists, foresters, police or media. Yet sharing such experiences is a way of validating activists' relationships with nature and each other. Discussing this issue, one participant told me that this inquiry would be useful to address this taboo among activists:

That's why I think, what I was saying before, that a lot of other activists might like to read what you've got to say, because they're connecting with things. They're seeing that they're not the only one that thinks and feels that in a culture where it's not talked about ... we had a little box that people could anonymously drop in something that they'd written about they felt, because I felt like no one was talking about it. There's so many things that we don't actually talk to each other about. Then when everyone read these and they saw that - they didn't know who'd written each piece, but they were like, all these people felt similar to me. I think that's why your thing might be good for that.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has described the methods that were used and some of my reflections about the research, focussing primarily on technical issues about the interviews. The primary research method was the employment of extended, narrative interviews that sought participants' stories about their interactions with nature, their changing identity and conceptualisation of nature, and its relationship with action. Twenty two interviews were

undertaken with forest and whaling activists. The research experience reinforced upon me the ethically potent character of human research. I was struck by the extraordinary nature of each participant and the privilege that it was to interview them. This gave rise to a strong sense of moral obligation to do justice to the stories they gave me.

The following two chapters will extend the account of the methods used. Chapter 6 presents descriptions of my encounters with the activist groups. It also provides a description of an interview, to give the reader an appreciation of my efforts to obtain data of sufficient depth to address the research questions. Chapter 7 will introduce the methods used to transcribe and analyse the interview data.

Chapter 6 The interviews

The events belong, as it were, to the place, and to tell the story of those events is to let the place itself speak through the telling.

Abram 1997: 163

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with an appreciation of the nature of my encounters with activists and efforts to obtain data that achieved sufficient depth to understand their experiences and meaning making. The previous chapter provided a description of the methods and a discussion of the technical aspects of social research, such as the lessons learned managing the interview process and the ethical issues that arose. In that discussion the focus was the relationship between method and practice. This part provides the contextual dimension to the research, situating the interviews within the Sea Shepherd and forest activist settings.

The chapter opens with an overview of the interview schedule. This is followed by descriptions of my encounters with the *Bob Barker* and the Florentine protest camp, Camp Floz. An account of the experience of interviewing an activist in her tree-sit is also provided. The next section reflects upon the experiences of encountering and interviewing activists and makes some findings about their shared social identities. Excerpts from the interview transcripts are presented to corroborate the significance to the participants of being in an activist community. Finally, the role of nature as an actant is introduced.

INTERVIEW SETTINGS

The challenge of social research is to obtain data, and that data must be of a quality that meets the demands of the research questions. I had to find a way of yielding quality data that achieved a sufficient depth of meanings and ideas, with the cooperation of research participants, some of whom were resistant to talking about things that they were anxious might be derided by their fellow activists. Relationship building, guaranteeing anonymity and winning trust were part of the answer, as was trying to make the interview feel like a conversation (which it was). Another aspect of the challenge, was finding interview venues that reflected the participant's activism. The idea was that this would assist both of us to make a psychological shift from whatever concerned us that day, and inhabit the participants' lives as activists in the natures they defended. In the case of forest activist interviews I preferred to interview in a forest or outdoor setting. I held all Sea Shepherd interviews on board the *Bob Barker* and it is to those interviews that we now turn.

INTERVIEWING WHALING ACTIVISTS

The *Bob Barker* is an ex-whaling ship, originally part of the Norwegian whaling fleet: whale hunter become whaler hunter. I first visit the vessel where it is moored in Sullivans Cove, Hobart in March 2011. It is painted matt black above the waterline. The only relief to this colour scheme is the white, piratical Sea Shepherd logo painted on the superstructure below the wheelhouse (a skull, underneath which the pirate's crossbones are replaced by a shepherd's crook and a trident). The Australian and Aboriginal flags are flying from the foremast and at the stern the Dutch tricolour. With its high, sharply angled bow, it looks dangerous, menacing. Close up the impression of a warrior vessel is reinforced by a two metre long gash in the starboard bow between the waterline and the anchor, an injury sustained during a violent exchange with the Japanese fleet a few weeks earlier. On the

foredeck a black inflatable is lashed down with webbing straps. Behind the superstructure an ungainly looking helicopter deck with a low railing around it, and below this, on another deck, most of the available space is occupied by barrels of avgas and petrol, also lashed down with heavy webbing.

A sign offers tours and a line of people is queuing at the gangplank. The sign also requests donations of fresh fruit and vegetables. I watch an elderly couple present a crew member with a box of food. The crew are easily identified by their black, long sleeved t-shirts and hoodies, with the Sea Shepherd logo over the left breast and 'crew' on the sleeve. When I introduce myself to the crew member who is controlling access to the *Bob Barker*, she is friendly and encouraging. She invites me on board and tells me to look for Ben Potts who was in charge of the ship.

I find Ben in the mess, a long narrow room on the port side. It has bench seats and tables arranged as in a railway carriage with an aisle along the centre. Photos from previous voyages are on the walls and I can see Hobart town through the round, heavily reinforced portholes. A couple of crew members are drinking coffee and a group of visitors file down the aisle following another crew member. Ben is very busy and our brief conversation is constantly interrupted. He expresses interest in my inquiry and suggests I return the following week to brief the crew and recruit interview participants.

I return as arranged, but most of the crew have left for their homes on the Australian mainland or overseas. I have lost most of my potential recruits and will have to wait until the next season if I want to conduct face-to-face interviews. Fortunately, I am able to conduct two interviews that day in the Captain's cabin, a small, airy room immediately below the wheelhouse.

I revisit the *Bob Barker* the following March. The ship is moored at the same dock. It looks now more military than pirate, painted this time in dazzle camouflage: angular geometric shapes of blue, black and grey. The white teeth of a shark's mouth extend several metres along both sides of the bow. Ben Potts remembers me. He kindly recommends me to the crew, nine of whom I interview over the following couple of weeks, before most of them fly home. Interviews are conducted this time on the foredeck, next to the inflatable, a place where it is possible to conduct an uninhibited interview out of the hearing of the visitors who are touring the ship.

INTERVIEWING FOREST ACTIVISTS

One of the symbolic centres of forest activists is Camp Floz, a protest camp established on the Gordon River Road in the Upper Florentine Valley in 2006, and continuously occupied since then. The camp has been through several incarnations. I remember a visit to the camp in the summer of 2006-07. It was on fire and no one was there. Activists' clothes and belongings were strewn around the main post and beam framework of the tarpaulin covered kitchen. A pair of leather boots hung from a nail and a gas bottle lay on its side in the middle of the fire. Activists told me this happened regularly. This and other occasions of violence meted out to activists included torching protestor's cars, and alleged assaults against protestors by forestry workers and sympathisers. In October 2008, a hidden activist filmed three forestry workers perpetrating what must have been a terrifying attack upon two activists who were in their car. The men used a sledgehammer and their boots to break the car windows. They pulled one activist out of the car through the window and assaulted him. In January 2009 a senior manager of Forestry Tasmania, the government owned business responsible for managing the state's public forests, called for the removal of the protest camp, describing it as a slum housing extremists.

Beginning in January 2009 until May 2009 Forestry Tasmania began operations to a clearfell coupe designated FOo44A, situated behind the protest camp. Finally, in May and assisted by over 60 police officers, Forestry Tasmania spent several days breaking up the camp. The direct action activists were joined by several hundred other citizens (including myself), who attempted unsuccessfully to form a barrier between the roading into the coupe and the main road. The loggers pushed a road through and felled about half of the coupe.

The protesters reestablished their camp after the 'bust' in an effort to protect the remaining half, which they feared would be logged the following season. This camp was set alight and destroyed in September 2012, while the activists were absent. It is this camp that I visited to recruit participants.

One of my early relationship building visits to Camp Floz was in May 2011. The camp is sited on a straight stretch of the Gordon River Road. From the car the road feels narrow and claustrophobic, hemmed in on both sides by forest. Protest banners are hung from the trees. A small wooden structure waterproofed by a blue tarp stands at the entrance to the Timbs walking track. It is advertising walks into the old-growth forest, past trees with names such as Twisted Sister and Lungs of the Land. A table holds information sheets and notice boards with photographs of forest plants and wildlife (education and natural history research are other activities undertaken to bolster the campaign).

About 100m beyond the shelter is the dirt track into the logging coupe and Camp Floz proper. A wooden pole blocks the entrance and the track has been dug away leaving behind a narrow bridge that would not support logging machinery. On the other side is a shelter: a series of overlapping tarps supported by poles and festooned with ropes. A complicated arrangement of poles and ropes that are tied to the ground, to trees and to each other. Some ropes lead up into the forest canopy, reaching what looks

like a couple of tree-sits about 50m above the ground. Even though my view is foreshortened, the mature eucalypts, which contain this space, seem extraordinarily large; their silvery grey, broken tops reaching into the mist that hangs over the forest. Underneath are myrtle, sassafras, shrubs, moss and tree ferns. A massive tree trunk lying across the road bisects the tent. Around the camp are several small gardens, bounded by sticks. They are planted with ferns and seedlings, an attempt to relieve the logging road's ugliness perhaps.

My diary record of this visit begins: "A cloudy, showery day. The camp is wet, muddy and scruffy. The activists are wet, muddy and scruffy". Three people sit around a smoky fire underneath the tarp. A large billy (pan or pot) is boiling water. For seats an old settee and arm chairs: an outdoor squat. I introduce myself and offer the fruit and chocolate that I have brought with me. I am aware that I am engaged in a performance as 'researcher' (Goffman 1959). I'm invited to sit and have a mug of tea. Someone cooees from a tree-sit. A woman emerges from the trees and wanders down to my car. She returns a few minutes later and sits with us. It's cold and I feel out of place in my clean clothes and warm fleece jacket. The activists are dressed in old, mostly black, clothes and what look like op-shop jackets and coats. Everything is damp.

Whenever I visit the Floz I am struck by how friendly and welcoming the activists are. Today, two are backpackers, one from the United States and the other from Germany. They say they are here to support the campaign before continuing their travels. The other activists call Tasmania home. With the exception of a woman who I guess is in her sixties, they all seem to be in their early twenties. I am aware that I am being checked out. They want to know where my sympathies lie (an example of what ethnomethodologists describe as membership categorization). I tell them a bit of my history and why I am undertaking my inquiry. A man tells me that

he sees fairies in the trees. One of the three women is quite cynical about the project and she does not want to be interviewed. Another woman, who has barely spoken, offers quietly to do an interview. There is not time or suitable weather to interview at the camp today, but she and one of the men tell me they are coming into Hobart on the following weekend. So I arrange to meet them in Salamanca Place where we will find a suitable place.

This was a successful trip (although only one of the two activists showed up to be interviewed). Sometimes I would head out to the Florentine to find nobody there. However, in the end of March 2012 I visit the camp, finding it occupied by some people who have recently arrived and do not fit my selection criteria. They tell me where I might find someone in a tree-sit in the Styx valley.

AN INTERVIEW IN A TREE

My first attempt to find the tree-sit is a failure. I follow the tagged trail through the forest but can not find the tree. After several emails and telephone calls I am able to arrange an escort by an activist to the tree-sit. A couple of weeks after my first attempt we leave Hobart early in the morning and drive to a small pullover a few kilometres west of Maydena. I pack my rucksack with my notebook, laptop, iPod, lunch, first aid kit and climbing gear, lock the car and we set off into the forest.

We follow a flagged trail through the dense vegetation, winding around massive trees and on one occasion walking along a fallen trunk, rotting, slippery and home to mosses and epiphytes. It is dark and quiet. Occasionally we see small brown Tasmanian Scrubwrens, but otherwise the forest is still. After about half an hour we emerge onto a logging road. The glare is startling and I shade my eyes until they adjust. It is also warmer and I stop to have a drink and take off a jumper. We follow this road and then another past clearfells and old-growth forest for a couple of kilometres.

Eventually we make a right hand turn up a steep gravel road that climbs the hillside in a series of zigzags. We walk through a denuded landscape, reduced to piles of wood, bark, broken tree ferns, earth, stones and boulders. At the end of this trail, at the forest edge, we follow a foot track into the old-growth.

The tree is a magnificent swamp gum, the tallest flowering plant in the world. About four metres in diameter at its buttressed base, it towers above the forest. A collar of corrugated tin is affixed around the trunk, perhaps 30 metres up, to hinder police scaling the tree. The first branches are almost as high again. Higher still, nestled in the canopy, is the platform, about 60 metres above the ground, the equivalent of the 20th storey of a skyscraper.

A tarp has been erected a few metres away, to provide shelter to her support crew. We take off our rucksacks and rest. A cooee and a rope is dropped from the platform. An activist abseils down to meet us. He is one of my interview participants, whom I interviewed several months earlier in woodland on the outskirts of Hobart, where he had been practicing his tree climbing skills. He describes how he and his colleagues designed this tree-sit, smuggled the materials in at night and erected it in darkness to surprise the loggers the following morning.

I double-check my climbing harness, jumars and the prussic knot that I have tied onto the rope in case a piece of equipment fails. I check my pack, which I have attached to a climbing sling so it will hang below me, and begin to ascend the rope.

I do not know how long it takes to climb up to the tree-sit; it was probably about half an hour. I lose my sense of time and spin around slowly as I ascend. The tree trunk: solid, impassive, slowly tapering. The a view into the forest that the direct action has saved for now at least: greens, browns, densely textured, shards of light penetrating gaps in the canopy. Spinning

further, the clear-fells: a flattened, monochrome, two-dimensional landscape of coarse grained metallic greys and narrow, winding logging roads, a ribbon of green hugging a creek.

Lift, step up, lift, step up, rest.

I rise higher and emerge from the shade of the rainforest into the bright, aerial world of the forest canopy. Bands of small black headed honeyeaters fly past. A currawong perches on a branch and watches me. The air loses its mustiness, gaining the freshness of eucalyptus. I am aware of the breeze and am grateful for it, hot from the exertion.

The platform surrounds the tree trunk. It is made from two or three standard pieces of plywood, strengthened with a wooden frame, built around the trunk and tied to the tree. The climbing rope passes up through a small trap door. I climb through and sit, out of breath and very hot. I am told to pull up the rope, so that police cannot use it to access the tree-sit, shut the trap door, take off my boots and try to catch my breath.

The tree-sitter is seated opposite me next to her shelter, a tarp hung over a rope containing a sleeping bag and her personal effects. There is a solar panel and notebook computer. She emanates calm, poise and friendliness: this visit feels something akin to an audience. It would be easy to undertake a hagiography (as a modern day stylite or pole-saint perhaps), but I am here to learn about her experiences and meaning making. I introduce myself, thank her for allowing me into her tree-sit and give her a gift (an offering?) of chocolate.

We spend almost two hours in the tree-sit talking. Our conversation includes the tree that supports her platform and which, if not for her presence, would have been destroyed. At times the tree feels like an active participant. Its presence is felt strongly, and I find myself patting it, acknowledging and including it. It defines our physical space and asserts

itself into our interview. In one respect the tree-sit interview is like my interviews on the *Bob Barker*: the platform rocks gently in response to the thermals that flow over us much as the boat responded to waves and currents in the harbour.

My iPod and computer batteries run out, but she keeps thinking of more things to tell me. Eventually and reluctantly, forced by the increasingly insistent calls from below and a full bladder, I make my thanks, say goodbye and descend. My last view of her is her smiling, sitting cross-legged, as she has sat throughout the interview.

REFLECTIONS ON THE EXPERIENCE OF ENCOUNTERING ACTIVISTS

This section has described the nature of my encounters with Sea Shepherd and forest activists. It aimed to enhance the technical description of interviewing, presented in the methods chapter, by providing the reader with thick descriptions of the way data was generated and what the experience was as an interviewer. A thick description (Geertz 1973) aims to represent experience in such a way that it “produces for readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described” (Denzin 2001: 100). Through thick description it is intended that readers can look through the eyes of the describer and imagine themselves in the experience. Writing a thick description has theoretical implications for representation and interpretation of the material in this inquiry. It is an interpretive act, which in addition to representing experience creates meaning. The writer must be reflexive about the choices they make in deciding what to include and what to emphasise; they must be aware of the relationship between their own subjectivity and their commitment to providing an accurate representation of the experience. This will be particularly important when representing the participants’ experiences.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BEING IN COMMUNITY WITH OTHERS

The experiences described above yield useful insights into the nature of the shared identities of both groups. Their ideologies, experiences and lifestyles encourage distinctive cultures. (Comprehensive descriptions of the cultures of the Sea Shepherd Society and Tasmanian forest activists are given by Heller (2007) and Krien (2010) respectively.) The descriptions of encountering and interviewing activists given here suggest that their relatively small numbers compared with larger environmental movement organisations, their separation and relative isolation, their physical expressions of difference, their adoption of sophisticated activism strategies that must be mastered, and their participation in practices that transgress societal norms, contribute to a cohesive, shared identity.

Both the forest and Sea Shepherd activists are physically separated from mainstream society, the former camping in the bush and the latter living and voyaging on board a 'pirate' ship. Such separation further emphasises their membership of a distinct community. Although activists in both groups identify homes separate from campaign sites, their extended stays in camp or on board in small communities reinforces separation and difference from mainstream society. This facilitates the adoption of distinct cultural practices, such as, for example, vocabularies that are foreign to outsiders (in the case of forest activists a *wallaby's* role is to hide with a camera to record an action, a *bunny* is someone able to be arrested, and a *possum* is a tree-sitter.)

The activists must master a range of skills that have become increasingly sophisticated. Creating media friendly actions involving the construction of complicated obstacles that place the activist's safety in the hands of their adversaries (manufactured vulnerability, Doherty 1999) requires specialised

skills. Similarly the demands of campaigning safely in the Southern Ocean, requires specialised skills and equipment.

Both groups are engaged in practices that transgress social norms and laws. The forest activists create protests as acts of civil disobedience. This entails covert practices to avoid detection until the action has been established. The Sea Shepherd Society claims that, rather than engaging in civil disobedience, it is enforcing the law because national and international law enforcement agencies refuse to do so. Its methods, however, are self-consciously piratical and outside mainstream societal norms, including activities such as sabotaging whaling operations and sinking whaling ships.

Participating collectively in protest actions and their consequences reinforces social bonds and cultural norms. Ava expressed several elements of this discussion when she spoke about her identity as a forest activist:

John So being part of community is a really significant, in being, you know, up in the forest.

Ava Yeah, I had never had that before. I'm very close with my mum and we would do anything for each other, but I have never had that anywhere else. So that was new and overwhelming and wonderful.

John So, what's different about it? Why do you find yourself in community with these people, compared with other places?

Ava Um (pause) I think, it struck me recently. Because these people think the same way. I've never met people who think the same way as me before (pause) (John: so interesting). Yeah, and recently (pause). I've been on my own and just getting on with it. And then I met all these other people and they're like that, plus some. And it's like, "oh yeah, I've thought that way for years." I suppose it's a confirmation of what you are thinking and feeling is valid and (pause).

John But validated?

Ava Yeah, yeah. That has been amazing, that part of it.

John Ok, look that's terrific. So what does it mean to you Ava, to be, you know, a forest activist, in terms of the person you are?

Ava Yeah. It's funny 'cause in some ways I don't feel like I'm a full forest activist because I can't put myself in a position to lock on or climb a tree. You know, like climbing a tree is one of the skills that is on the cards to learn for me. But, um, oh, what was the question again?

John That's fine. What does it mean to you to be a forest activist.

Ava (Long pause) What does it mean to me?

John In terms of who you think you are.

Ava Yeah. In some ways it's like coming home. It's (pause). Well it's almost like being where I've been. I've been around all sorts of different people. I've lived in the poorest suburbs of Hobart. I've lived in some of the most expensive suburbs of Hobart on and off my whole life.

Because I've always been different. It's only the last couple of years I've had the dreadlocks and that sort of stuff, but, you know, when I was a teenager I was the whole punk thing, a bit Goth looking. I've always been different and I've always looked different and I suppose, this is the first time I've ever. Which is weird, because I've never wanted to look the same as anyone else either (John: laughs), but, it's funny now that I find people that they think similar to me and they look similar to me and it's quite weird actually because I've never wanted to be the same and I never wanted to conform and be the same as anyone else, but all of a sudden this whole community of people that five minutes after they meet you. It's like, you know, there's connections and there's like, they'd always put their life on the line for you and that sort of stuff. It's amazing. That probably doesn't answer your question does it? (Laughs.)

Fifteen participants said the social experience was an important part of their activism. For some, such as Ava, the attraction was finding themselves in communities of people like them. The experience of feeling included, as opposed to excluded, from community is obviously powerful. Mia's sense of self is tied up with her community. Forest activism is an intersection of her love of activism and her love of forests, but it is the experience of

membership of a community of people who share similar values to her that is central to her participation:

John I wanted to ask how being a forest activist has shaped your sense of who you are?

Mia Yeah. Well. Very much. (pause) And certainly for me it's about coming back to Tassie and it's about this place in particular. But it's also about, (pause) um, in terms of identity, I'm not really sure. In terms of lifestyle, community, ambition, like what direction I want my life to go in, and my health and well being in general, I think it's been a very fundamental kind of part of it for me. And it gives meaning too.

I kind of think in general that part of being human is helping other people. And also a huge part of my identity I've come to realise is tied up with community. And I have, um, I have become in touch with like (pause) Not just through activists, but also through, not just with forest activism, but through activism. And also not just through forest activism, but through forests if that makes sense (John: yes).

There's vast networks across Australia about all kinds of issues, which I still feel like a real baby in terms of all this stuff. There's activists that are so much more active than me and I kind of feel that even calling myself an activist. You know, I wouldn't want to say that I'm up there, determined. (pause) You know what I'm saying? (John: I know exactly what you are saying, thank you). But being part of that is like really for me so positive because I find people who think the same way as me. Not exactly. Not the same, but the same way in a sense. But that's a hugely comforting thing for a person, for your identity (John: yeah, yeah). A lot of the things that I've thought and the way I've approached things have been for a lot of the time, working in certain fields. Administration. I mean, I used to work in offices, things like that, I'd really feel I was the odd one out. And that's a really uncomfortable feeling (John: yes). So being part of this, in terms of identity, is very much a part of being, a consequence of being part of a community.

Charlotte's identity as member of an activist group is a source of pride. Difference arises from separation from the mainstream:

John What does it mean to be a forest activist for you in terms of how you think about who you are?

Charlotte I'm not sure. I guess (long pause)

John Difficult question to ask, I know.

Charlotte Pride. I guess that I'm standing up for something that I believe in. I guess that it helps me feel like I've achieved things and I don't stress about little things because I know they're not that important.

John I guess you're also doing activism with other people who think and feel in a similar way to you.

Charlotte Yeah.

John Is that an important part of your life as an activist?

Charlotte I think so. I think sometimes it feels like we just get in our own little bubble and you come out and everyone is so different.

John Whereas a lot of people would say activists and ferals are different, dress and ...

Charlotte Yeah, and I think that's because we spend so much time in our own little world that we just get more and more in our own little world, and you pop out and there's all these shiny people walking around.

Riley, an experienced mariner and fisherman was interested in marine conservation. He applied to join the Sea Shepherd Society after watching an episode of *Whale Wars*. Unlike many other members of the *Bob Barker* crew he did not have animal rights activist experience and did not feel like a good fit until he had learned, practiced and become part of the vessel's culture.

Riley So I arrived here in Hobart on March 9th of last year. I had (pause), this was two and a half years ago. I got involved with the Boston chapter back home and did some fundraising and stuff like that but I arrived here March 9th last year right after campaigning [that, is the return of the vessel from the Summer campaign], was not vegan, had no clue what veganism was, had been

vegetarian, had been – my ex-wife is a nutritionist so, but I still didn't have a clue what vegan was. So I arrived in my leather boots, my leather coats, my leather wallet, my leather hat and the people that picked me up from the airport looked at me like, "who the fuck are you?"

John Like you are taking the piss or something.

Riley And just immediately was bombarded with, "what are you wearing? Why are you here?" and I felt really out of place. Here is all of these people who had just come back from Antarctica, who have got this common bond and here's this new guy just feeling like a complete outsider. But a few key individuals took me aside and...(iPod battery dies).

John ... Sorry Riley, you were talking about the whole circle of coming to understanding veganism.

Riley Yeah, it was just I grew up wanting to do all this good and knowing that there's all these different paths that you can take. But at the same time I had no clue about the vegan issue and the connection to not just diet but the animal rights activism. But just like I said, it brought it all full circle. And just brought it all into one big issue of conservation for the animals, for the planet and our species as a whole, not realising that it was all these separate entities. Now it's one big entity and it's real easy to latch on to I'm just going to save whales; I'm just going to protest for; I'm just going to save the forest. No, it's all one big thing and I think that's one a true activist can say they're really just grasping the whole thing.

John So when you're beginning to grasp that and you're living that as well. That's huge isn't it? If you think of yourself now and two and a half years ago...

Riley Yeah, it was like I knew nothing two and a half years ago. So it's almost like this solidifies the – it was almost like all the training that may be of my life has got me to this point. And now it honestly feels like, now I can walk the walk, it's not just talking the talk.

Joining a community of activists is empowering and gives the members a sense of doing something useful. Ricketts, describing the distinct cultures that emerged in the Northeast New South Wales forest campaigns of the 1990s, also notes that participating in the blockades was "fun and provided

participants with a strong sense of belonging to a large, like minded and reciprocal social movement” (2003: 2).

Finally, Sam’s, motivation to choose environmental activism as a way to “fight the power”, was the people he would spend time with and the skills he would learn:

John One of the things I’m really keen to learn from people is their kind of experiences of when they first arrive in a place like the Florentine.

Sam I remember I sort of cruised in and yeah, I guess it was definitely the first time I’d seen that many big trees, as it probably is for most people. Yeah. I remember there was a few crew rigging a monopole to a tree-sit. I think there’s quite a few people that camp at that point, because I think they’d had a bit of a callout. So yeah, I guess the social environment was another whole aspect to it, which is also in a way more absorbing. It sort of takes a while to appreciate nature I reckon, because it’s just sitting there waiting to be appreciated because it’s got the time, but there’s aspects of those there.

John That’s one thing that I think just about everyone has told me, that coming into community with other people who think similarly to you.

Sam Yeah. So I think like the social aspect of it, which I think for most people is quite daunting. There’s like a familiarity to being around these people that have a similar headspace. It’s also quite a broad range of people that have a connection to protecting ancient eco systems. So you get quite a pretty broad range of people there and other structures that come along with all that.

Membership of the activist groups is clearly a significant aspect of the participants’ lives, one that I had underestimated. Each group has formed a distinctive culture built around being different to and isolated from mainstream cultures. Each group also provides its members clearly identified goals and activities that demonstrate the usefulness of their participation.

INTRODUCING NATURE

This part has presented a description of my encounters with activists and the interview experience. The analysis emphasises the significance of human interaction in meaning making, identity and culture formation; it identifies cultural achievements constructed through social practices. The significance of community to the participants is introduced through excerpts of interview transcripts that stress the importance of finding people to be with who think like they do, who take pride in their difference and who have a distinct cultural identity.

Reflections such as these, with their focus on human to human interaction, provide the basis for a conventional sociological exploration of activism. But, that is not the purpose of this inquiry, because what it is concerned with is the role that nature plays in activist experience and meaning making. This is a role that is granted little attention in the above analysis: nature is absent or passive. A re-reading of the thick descriptions, particularly the tree-sit interview, (one that adopts the epistemological standpoint proposed in the methodology chapter and that incorporates the concept of more-than-human nature in its analytical framework) reveals nature as an active participant (an actant) in the physical, temporal and affective dimensions of the encounters (nature is there too in the transcript excerpts). Of course, to focus on the role of nature is not to diminish the significance of human to human interaction that has been identified here. This investigation is not trying to find an alternative explanation for radical environmental activism. Rather, it is exploring an element of activist experience and identity.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have provided descriptions of my encounters with the two activist groups and the research participants to assist the reader to

appreciate the context and settings of both the activist's campaigns and the interviews themselves. As I reflected upon my experiences I realised that I had underestimated the significance for the research participants of being in community with other activists. While this is not the primary focus of this inquiry it is clearly an important contributor to activist identity and meaning making. This chapter has ended, however, by re-orientating the study to focus upon nature-participant relationships and its contribution to an understanding of radical environmentalism. The next chapter will describe the transcription and coding of the interviews, coding that consciously explores these interactions.

Chapter 7 Data transcription and analysis

Things turn very fuzzy just when they seemed to become so clear.

van Manen 1990: 41

INTRODUCTION

The interviews are transcribed and subjected to a thematic analysis that seeks to identify elements of the participant's experiences. The process of transcribing interview recordings has theoretical implications for the subsequent analysis. The choices made about how to represent the interviews are discussed, acknowledging my role in constituting the data. A similar approach is taken to the account of the coding and identification of themes. Important interpretive decisions are made in this analytical stage that fundamentally affect the inquiry's findings. The purpose of thematic analysis is to find common elements in the data that can be used to understand the phenomenon under study. The transcripts are coded thematically during this analytical stage.

TRANSCRIPTION

The complete interview was transcribed, rather than selecting parts of the interviews that struck me as useful at that time. I decided that having complete transcripts, would enable a more flexible approach to analysis as my learning and thinking about the interviews evolved. I used a simple transcribing format, identifying myself as John and using the participant's pseudonym. I was as faithful as possible to the recording when making decisions about punctuation. I noted pauses and changes in mood and laughter, although I did not record other affective dimensions such as non-verbal communication. I included brief interruptions and utterances within

parentheses in the main speaker's transcription, rather than placing them on a separate line.

I recognised that I was making interpretive and analytical decisions throughout the construction of the transcript as a representation of the interview, a process that would affect the thematic analysis I was about to undertake (Riessman 2008). In light of this, I reviewed the way I had represented the participant's and my voices as I undertook the thematic analysis by listening to the recording and considering whether I had remained faithful to the interview.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS: SELECTION AND INTERPRETATION

The process of analysing multiple interview transcripts involves decisions about what is noticed, selected and the ways in which it is presented. "An investigator sits with pages of tape-recorded stories, snips away at the flow of talk to make it fit between the covers of a book, and tries to create sense and dramatic tension" (Riessman 2002a: 226). While necessary, selecting excerpts from the transcripts risks losing context and the participant's voice. To minimise this, participant quotations generally include the complete response as well as my questions and responses. The excerpts remain largely faithful to the telling and are not reduced to cleaned and minimised selections of the most significant words and sentences.

Participants' representations of their experiences offer various analytical treatments. I followed van Manen's guidance about the identification of themes that relate to the phenomenon under study (1990: 87-88). The researcher must be reflexively aware that analysis is happening throughout the interviewing, transcribing, formal analysis (such as coding) and writing stages. Transcripts were read line by line. Participant responses and stories were interrogated for their thematic meaning. The themes were identified and the transcripts annotated accordingly. This was a personal process and I

identified the themes without reference to other studies, trying as much as possible to bracket my presuppositions and biases. I undertook the coding exercise during a two week visit to a remote part of the Tasmanian southwest world heritage area, where I was usually alone and able to immerse myself in the transcripts. This of course, was not the only time I revisited the transcripts or the coding, but it seemed appropriate to do the main work in a natural environment, rather than an office with the attendant distractions of university and domestic life.

Many stories offered multiple meanings and themes. Decisions had to be made about what was most relevant to the research question. This sometimes meant that interesting lines of inquiry would not be followed during the preparation of this thesis. Take the following narrative about the experience of tree-sitting. Earlier in the interview, Sophie was telling me about how living in the bush helps her maintain a connection to nature, something she found very difficult in Melbourne. I asked her what feeling connected is like:

Sophie It's just the same as when I hang out with a friend, it's not really any different, including like probably the conversations that I have out loud, and probably get different responses from a river or a tree.

John I'd be really interested in any stories you might have about relationships you've formed, or when you've spoken to it and it's spoken back, or whatever?

Sophie Well, I sat up one tree. That one tree I was climbing up and down it every day, and would climb up at night and get down at maybe six pm the next day. So I was always climbing up at night, and then sitting throughout the day, and there was no one else around. It was just me sitting in this tree. How long it was for? It was for quite a while I did that. And definitely the relationship I was having with that tree was probably more real than any other relationship I was having with people who I was seeing for maybe two hours a day.

And I had a fellow tree-sitter who was also going through the same experience; she was like 50 metres away or something. We'd occasionally yell out to each other, but we'd both get down the same time and walk back to

camp. So yeah at the end of that experience we were both talking to each other, and she said to me, “I know this is going to sound crazy but I talk to my tree and he talked back.” And it’s like, “I know, I did the same thing.”

Yeah, I guess in terms of actual words that’s not actually how it felt, it didn’t feel like it was saying, “Hi, my name is.” It wasn’t like that, it was more like there were thought processes going through my head all the time, because what else am I going to do? I might as well think. And I was getting answers that didn’t feel like they were coming from me.

John Right. Gosh, how interesting.

Sophie And yeah I guess a lot of people would just go, “that’s just because you had the time and the space to sit there and delve into parts of your brain that you probably not ever have time or space to.” I think I was getting up a very old tree that had a lot of stuff to share and he felt like he could share it with me.

This is a powerful and rich narrative, which, in a few sentences, reveals much about the lived experience of forest activism and connection with nature. Sophie spends each day in the same tree-sit in the expectation that loggers and police could arrive suddenly. It is time spent largely alone, although she can make contact with a colleague in a neighbouring tree. They return to camp each evening to join the other activists engaged in the blockade.

Sophie forms a relationship with her tree; it is just her and the tree up there. For Sophie relationships with trees can be like relationships with human friends; non-humans can be people too. The enforced stillness gives plenty of time to think and the tree seems to become implicated in her thinking processes.

Both activists seem to experience a shift in their awareness of their tree, radically altering their appreciation of it. The participant’s colleague is self-conscious and aware of the risk she is taking by telling her colleague that she talks to her tree and it “talked back”, something that is clearly not normal. She prefaces her conversation with a phrase that serves the

function of both warning her colleague and asking to be taken seriously, not dismissed. Sophie affirms her colleague's experience. She then qualifies her story to me (perhaps because she is worried I would not take her seriously), by trying to provide a rational explanation for an experience that she seems to think is not rational. I wonder whether Sophie's decision to include her colleague's experience in the narrative is a way of giving validity to her story.

Sophie's comment about the tree's age also seems significant; this is an ancient being that has wisdom. Interestingly, both people assign a masculine gender to the tree, something I missed during the interview that deserves further inquiry. Sophie does not anthropomorphise the tree when she stresses that the tree is not talking like a human, but it might have been useful to probe further. Finally, I am able to anticipate in this excerpt from the interview some of the reasons why Sophie will experience the grief she describes later, when her tree is cut down by loggers.

Sophie has incorporated a wide range of information and ideas into her story and the reader will no doubt identify things that have been missed in my interpretation. For example, I have focussed here on the experiential and affective dimensions of the story, rather than what she does. The focus is on the content rather than a structural analysis (Riessman 2008). I am also aware that I have not yet offered the participants an opportunity to provide feedback about my interpretations of their narratives.

So far this interpretation has been about the visible elements of the narrative. But it is also possible to unearth deeper level meanings. Sophie told this story in response to a question about the experience of connection with nature through the formation of communicative relationships. The way she has told the story, that is, the technical structure and the meaning making involved, provides clues about the way she conceptualises nature. Sophie has told us how, in time, she comes to experience the tree as a non-

human person or being, for which she has a lot of respect. With time spent in the tree-sit Sophie is no longer a subject 'I' relating to an object 'it'. The tree has become fully subject, and, after Buber, Sophie's relationship has become subject 'I' to subject 'thou' (see Buber's (1970: 57-58) account of his contemplation of a tree, of the manifold ways of responding to it, and being drawn into relation with it).

Such an interpretation leads me to think about Sophie's conceptualisation of nature generally. The story points to a biocentric perspective, in which the tree has inherent moral status as a living entity. Sophie does not tell us whether this was already her perspective of course, but told in this way, the narrative suggests that is the perspective she holds. The story also suggests an animist orientation: she engages with a world of non-human persons. Both interpretations provide lines of inquiry that I can pursue throughout Sophie's transcript, but they also remind me to seek them in the other transcripts.

Finally, the interpretations given to this story were not achieved in the one reading. They emerged through a hermeneutic cycle of reading, analysing, rereading and reanalysing.

Re-reading this story I am reminded of Riessman's statement that, "respondents narrativize particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society" (Riessman 1993: 3). Experiences such as those Sophie describes, are told with the knowledge that they contradict the social fact of the impossibility of meaningful, reciprocal communication with the non-human. As an interviewer I made it clear to participants that I was interested in stories such as these (although my 'gosh' is an indication of how surprised I was by Sophie's story). Even so, in the telling, participants often appeared self-conscious and stated they were careful whom they told about them. For example, Emily told me about a tree that seemed to communicate to some

people that it did not want to be a tree-sit (this story is introduced later). These people exercised great caution in telling about this experience. Instead, they gave rational explanations about the decision not to use the tree, reserving discussions about the experience of communication for those who shared the experience, or those she trusted. Re-reading the transcripts, I am reminded of the privilege that is being entrusted with stories such as these.

Coding

A thematic analysis was undertaken by identifying themes that seemed to describe something meaningful about the participants' accounts of their experiences. I coded the above story under the headings *relationship/reciprocity*, *communication*, *agency*, *nature familiarity/skills* and *biocentric attitude*. Reducing such a powerful narrative into a handful of themes seems to oversimplify Sophie's narrative, but as each transcript was coded my confidence grew that I had identified themes that were present in other participants' descriptions of their experiences and relevant to the conceptual framework. The reductionist approach, therefore, while generating seemingly spare interpretation of an individual interview, enables the researcher to identify the experiential structures of the experience when it is combined with the coding of the other interviews.

Thematic coding is a highly subjective process that, guided by the conceptual framework, is dependent to some extent upon the researcher's interests and state of mind at the time. I found that revisiting the transcripts led to fresh insights and new themes. Achieving rigour was an interplay between disproving the theme and arguing its relevance (its relevance to the research question but also its representation across the interviews). There is also a dialectic between the participants' voices and the researcher.

Phenomenology as method requires the researcher to bracket, or suspend, their presuppositions and beliefs about the world from the process of interpretation, in an effort to hear faithfully the participant's voice. This is not easy. Indeed, I found analysing the transcripts thematically the most difficult aspect of the research process. I learned that a reflexive approach is necessary. I also learned, with some considerable difficulty, that one needs flexibility: to stretch my tendency to seek black and white answers, clearly compartmentalised themes when, of course, human experience, meaning making and interpretation are far more complex, nebulous and paradoxical in nature.

Some theme names were renamed to match better the aspect of experience they seemed to represent. Some themes contained more than one related element, whereas other themes expressed an aspect of experience that seemed to stand alone. I became aware that I was identifying different kinds of themes. Some represented aspects of direct experience that were processual in nature and externally implicated such as, for example, *connectedness*, whereas a small number of others, such as *obligation*, while also borne from experience and engagement with nature, seemed to be more internally derived. Both are aspects of the experience of being in nature, but they are qualitatively different. The former seems to be more a product of the participant's sensual engagement with their surroundings, the other places a greater emphasis upon the internal – it comes from within.

Some themes were not retained. For example, early in the transcript analysis a theme called 'dreams' was established, because four participants told stories about experiences that included dreams. When no more dream stories were found I decided to dispense with the theme, allocating those stories to themes that represented the content and meaning of the dream stories.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has described how the interviews were transcribed and analysed. It has discussed and explained my decisions about the theoretical implications inherent in making decisions about these processes. These decisions have been guided by the inquiry's conceptual and methodological frameworks, which were illustrated using Sophie's story about her experience of a communicative relationship with a tree. The next chapter begins the presentation and analysis of the interview data, by exploring the participants' journeys into activism.

Part III: The lived experience of defending nature

Chapter 8 Becoming an activist

This part of the thesis presents and interprets the interview data. Chapter 8 describes the participant's engagement with environmental activism and their journey to the Sea Shepherd Society or the Tasmanian forest campaigns. The participants' stories describe changes in self-identity and their conceptualisation of nature. They also trace the participants' developing sense of personal responsibility to address environmental injustice, which ultimately becomes a commitment to engage in direct action. This chapter, when it is combined with the descriptions of the importance of the activist community to the participants presented in Chapter 6, establishes the social and cultural framework in which meaning making takes place during the second stage of the interview, which is concerned with the participants' encounters with the nature they are defending.

All the participants reported meaningful experiences of nature that initiated and/or confirmed their decision to join the environmental campaign, and which affected their conceptualisation of nature and their self-identity. The participants' encounters with nature are presented in chapters 9 to 12. The chapters are divided to present the phenomenological themes that emerged during the analysis. These chapters represent the bulk of the interview data analysis.

BECOMING AN ACTIVIST

This chapter is concerned with the research participants' journeys to activism. It presents and discusses examples of stories that typify the participant motivation and choice to engage in direct action. The concept of the epiphanic, or pivotal moment, which acts as a trigger to pursue environmental activism, emerges strongly from many stories.

The participants were generally introduced to the campaign by a friend or contact, and as we have seen in the previous chapter, they may have been attracted to the activist community membership and lifestyle. Thirteen participants (ten forest and three whaling activists) had previous activist experience prior to their current campaigns. This experience was not restricted to environmental activism, and several had been involved in social justice and human rights issues. One whaling activist was originally a forest activist in Tasmania. The majority of participants, however, did not have previous *direct action* experience.

A key difference between the two groups, however, is that in the case of the whaling activists, their decision to become a Sea Shepherd crew member is made prior to visiting the Southern Ocean, whereas most of the forest activists visited Tasmania's forests out of curiosity, rather than a clearly formulated plan to join the campaign. Their encounters, however, were so meaningful that they led to a commitment to join the campaign. Their accounts are treated separately, beginning with the whaling activists.

WHALING ACTIVISTS

Whaling activists generally made the decision to apply for a southern ocean campaign with the Sea Shepherd Society months or years before they were accepted as a crew member. Their journeys to direct action are largely founded upon an animal justice perspective. For example, Ella became a vegan and involved in animal rights charities. She then became interested in the Sea Shepherd Society as an organisation that was actively involved in trying to prevent marine exploitation:

John Perhaps you could tell me about your journey to the Sea Shepherd Society?

Ella Okay. I think it started in animal rights. I went vegetarian when I was 18 maybe, and consequently vegan. And with doing that, it was for animal rights reasons, not for taste or health reasons.

So that kind of led from one thing to another and into different animal charities. So Sea Shepherd, I think it was just looking at the fish. One of the questions people always ask you when you're vegetarian is why don't you eat fish, because they are free, they're caught, they're not held in factories and they're just caught out of the sea. So for me, being vegan and not eating fish is different to me not eating beef. It's that our oceans are dying and we're just taking everything and raping them of everything there is and no one seems to really care.

Sea Shepherd, I found, was one of those charities that was actively doing something. Not just saying, "please don't do this," or "let's change the rules," or "let's catch a little bit less". They were actively going out there and stopping people. Not many people. Not many charities and organisations have the guts to do that anymore. They're so brave and I really admired them, so I just wanted to get involved with them.

John Right, so you joined up, or you knew people in the organisation?

Ella Well, my boyfriend was a member of Sea Shepherd. He'd go away a lot for weekends and do fundraising. And I helped with him doing some fundraising onshore. Raising money and records and charity gigs and stuff, and then I put an application in. He went first. He went and did the Faeroes Campaign. And they needed a cook and I could cook, and they needed a vegan cook. So yeah, I got the call. I had a trial to see how I got on for the first few weeks and then I got to stay.

This story is an exemplar of a typical journey into Sea Shepherd activism. Ella describes the development of an animal justice conviction and its implications for her personal conduct. Her interest in marine conservation stems from the belief that the oceans are facing an ecological crisis and insufficient action is being taken to address this. She also feels that, apart from the Sea Shepherd Society, there is a dissonance between what the conservation movement says and what it does. I did not probe Ella about whether she saw value in conventional campaigning strategies, such as lobbying, scientific research, and witnessing environmental harms, but, she is clearly attracted to Sea Shepherd because it is actively working to prevent further harms through direct action campaigning. She admires the Sea

Shepherd members, one of whom is her boyfriend. She is incorporating within her self-identity a full time occupation as a radical environmentalist.

Ethan, Ella's boyfriend, also became an animal rights activist following his journey into human rights activism. But it was interacting with animals at an animal sanctuary where he experienced a personal connection to the animals themselves, that he made a decision to dedicate himself to animal justice.

John Perhaps you could tell me a bit about your journey.

Ethan I remember my journey always started with (pause). From a very early age I got into the punk music scene, which obviously breeds a different way of thinking and you listen to lyrics that aren't always so normal like love songs, etc. So, from there as I grew up, my first connection to the world of human rights, I did lots for Guantanamo Bay and the Burma campaign as a kid. Yeah, and just campaigns like that and also just local politics within Stop the War Coalition and stuff like this. That really started just from the Labour government and just growing up around listening to these lyrics and songs and just learning to think outside the box really.

John You're thinking ethically as well, aren't you?

Ethan Yeah, yeah, and then there was always the thing about the job, just trying to live a pure life as possible really, without trying to do harm to people and all the rest of it. So yeah, then that human rights stuff came along and then from there it developed. I still remember how there was a band called the Inner Terrestrials and they actually had a song called Barry Horne, and Barry Horne was an old animal rights activist who actually did a hunger strike in prison in England and died, unfortunately. He was a great, great man, used to do amazing work for animals. So, it was just that song basically and then that opened my mind and I started looking for who this guy was and this then led on to where my food was coming from and obviously then that led on to not only a veg/vegan diet but also taking up the next step of activism. Devoted my life to activism and helping animals and those who can't defend themselves. So yeah, it was really that song and then that just progressed into environmental activism and then finally becoming a volunteer for Sea Shepherd.

John You mentioned the idea of acting to defend those people who can't protect themselves. That's a conscious...

Ethan Yeah, I remember the day it connected was the first day we started getting thinking with that song and then that just led me into watching videos and films and documentaries about how animals are treated basically. You start making that connection of actually my food came here via this process and it wasn't so easy. I mean, it wasn't something I could overlook. So then, yeah, I adopted a vegetarian diet, which then later led on to a vegan diet.

I remember one day when my girlfriend moved to university in Norwich and we went there and there was actually a place called Hillside Animal Sanctuary there. It was - they basically rescued animals from the horse racing industry, from the factory farms. There's pigs, there's chickens. They had some amazing animals and for us just going there and you actually connect with these animals and just by being in such a place where they have a home that's free from fear, you get this understanding that actually they have feelings, they have emotions. You can feel the compelling happiness in them, or you can imagine what the loneliness and the fear must be in these animals.

So, it wasn't until I first came into connection with these creatures first-hand, being a metre away from them and looking them in the eyes, that it really connected and it was like, this is worth fighting for. If this is what it's like for thousands of animals, millions of animals around the world, then at least I can do something to try and stop this.

The experiential nature of Ethan's account of the connection with animals appeared in many participant's stories. This account appears framed by his and his partner's veganism and a visit to animals that had been rescued. Perhaps this creates the condition for an empathic interaction with animals, that gives rise to a new way of conceptualizing them. Indeed, stories of direct experience and connection were told by all participants. Sometimes they were told to explain the participant's journey into activism such as Ethan's. They were also told to explain the participant's deepening commitment to their activism.

One activist told a story about an abstract experience that led to her decision to become a marine scientist and, ultimately a Sea Shepherd activist. Ruby's journey to activism began as a child. She was describing her childhood holidays at the beach and why she felt more at home in the water than in other environments:

John So is that why you decided to do a marine zoology and biology course?

Ruby I think when I was a little girl. Obviously a little mermaid was the big thing for me. I pretty much decided when I was nine years old and I saw Free Willy. I went home and asked my Dad, "what's that job called?" and he said, "that's a marine biologist". I said, "Okay, that's what I am going to be then". I thought that the marine biologist was the one who freed whales, not so much the one who kept them in captivity, but that then led me onto learning more about dolphin captivity on my own when I was 17. So it was pretty much seeing Free Willy that pretty much started it all for me. Animal rights and environmental studies and all of that was just one movie.

Ruby's story was an outlier, however. All the other participants spoke about experiences of interacting with nature that seemed to radically transform their conceptualisation of it, and which contributed to their decision to join direct action campaigns. Such stories were often epiphanic in nature, or as Denzin puts it, "having had such a moment, the person is never quite the same again" (2001: 34). Captain Watson, the founder of the Sea Shepherd Society, while already a committed environmentalist, famously had an encounter with a dying whale that led to him dedicating his life to preventing whaling (Sea Shepherd Conservation Society nd). The epiphanic or pivotal moment is discussed in detail below, but an example is useful here to demonstrate the contribution that such moments make to a person's journey into activism. Thomas had an encounter with a whale that set him on course to become a whaling activist. He came from a fishing and marine background and had worked on boats for much of his adult life. His encounter occurred when he was working on the Queensland coast in eco-tourism:

Thomas ...one day we had what we call a mugging in the bay. That's when humpback whales come in to the boat like a group of them – three, four, five – and they just sit around the boat. So there was four whales at the front of the boat and the fifth one just kept circling around and I was standing up the back just letting the crowd stay at the front to see the whales because we'd seen them before. And then I just heard this huge blow-horn noise. I turned around and this humpback whale is right next to the boat. And I leaned out and just touched it on the nose and it was like wow, this is such an amazing feeling. It turned around and I purposely looked for its eye just to see if it could see me and it wasn't going to flip out that I had just touched it. So yeah, it turned and it's seen me and when I put my hand on it, it was the most amazing feeling that I felt. It's a feeling you just can't describe really. And the feeling of it was (pause) I was expecting it to be quite hard and rubbery. It was so soft.

It was amazing and at the same time as being completely overwhelmed that I got to touch this whale, this thought in the back of my head came through and was just like wow, it's so soft. It would be so quick to dissect and slice up and put into a can. You know, whenever I see animals I'm always thinking, it's always in the back of my head now, "Oh wow it's so beautiful. But, oh my gosh how can people do something to that creature?" I think if everyone maybe got a touch of this whale they would be so passionate to protect it.

John Yes, I think that's often the experience, actually – meeting the real thing. Was it aware of your touch, do you think?

Thomas Yeah, as soon as I touched it, it turned and that's when I looked in its eye and then it sort of just pulled away for a bit and went back down underwater. I remember just the biggest grin on my face and then the captain said, "Did you like that?" and 'cause I didn't think anyone was around I just got the biggest fright of my life.

John That's fantastic. Thank you for telling me that story. So how did you end up on the Bob Barker?

Thomas When I was supporting Greenpeace and I was really supportive of their anti-whaling campaign. And then one year – I had often donated to them – one year they decided that they weren't going to Antarctica and I was like, well, I've given you money to go to Antarctica. So I kind of felt like – a lot of other people felt this way too – that we were just being ripped off. We weren't giving money to this organisation to go to Japan and wave flags at them, we were

telling them to go down there, into the Southern Ocean with the whaling fleet. So after that I just moved away from Greenpeace and followed Sea Shepherd some more and realised how much work they did. It wasn't just the anti-whaling campaigns. They worked in the Galapagos Islands with the Ecuadorian government. For me, that was amazing – a non-government organisation working with a government. I just thought it was great. Also the Canadian seal hunt. We have a lot of seals in New Zealand and they are just amazing. If you're in the water with them, just having that interaction is amazing. And I couldn't imagine somebody smacking one over the head for its fur. And then so I followed the Canadian seal hunt as well.

So yeah, my passion for Sea Shepherd and interest for it just grew immensely. And I started up the Sea Shepherd New Zealand chapter with a few other ex-crew members who were off the ships, as New Zealand didn't have one at the time. And then, so we slowly started getting more and more support and then eventually the Sea Shepherd headquarters made an official group. So I was onshore for three years volunteering with them at events and stalls. And then one of the crew members was on the ship and he said oh, you know, "I think Thomas would be a great candidate. He's got experience with driving ships and stuff like that." And so he put a good word in for me with Peter Hammarstedt, our captain. And so Peter called me and it was the most amazing phone call I've ever had. It was two o'clock in the morning but I was just so shocked that Peter Hammarstedt had called me to join the crew. So I quit my job and came to the ship straight away. So that's sort of how it all happened – how I got here to the ship.

The two stories that Thomas told in succession are typical of the Sea Shepherd participants. Experiences of connection with nature, in particular with marine animals, affect their conceptualisation of them. They recognise these animals as individuals; the previous identification as undifferentiated other is lost. They form a belief that to kill these animals is wrong and this leads to a sense of moral obligation to stop the wrong. It is surprising how many participants related stories that resemble Captain Watson's. These stories occurred before the participants' interest in the Sea Shepherd Society, and I am not suggesting that they are mimicking him and creating a cultural meme (although the story could be refashioned after joining the

Sea Shepherd Society and prior to my interview). Irrespective of the details, the participants identify an experience with nature that triggers a reconsideration of their assumptions about animals, and ultimately their role in seeking social change. The participants are also disillusioned by the failure of mainstream activist groups to stop whaling and seal hunting. The Sea Shepherd Society deserves support because it is using direct action to stop harm now, rather than some time in the future. Many Sea Shepherd activists have also spent considerable time volunteering, and being inculcated into, the organizational culture before being accepted for a campaign in the Southern Ocean.

Chloe's journey to whaling activism was based on an animal justice perspective. This was reinforced through encounters with whales in the Southern Ocean and the realisation that her presence had saved them from whalers.

Chloe Yeah, they're beautiful. But that's the thing. You kind of pick your cause, but I don't see that a whale's life is more important than any other species or anything like that. It's not that I choose to save whales because they're more important than anyone else. They're just as important as a cockroach or an earthworm, as Paul [Captain Watson] would probably attest to. It's just that happens to be something I thought that I could go and do and really... play my role out that way.

Chloe's choice of whaling activism was in part based on opportunity. It is not that she has chosen whales above other animals that are subject to injustice, but this was an activist space where she could make a contribution.

Forest activists

Forest activists reported a different journey to the Tasmanian forest campaigns. While many had been involved in some kind of political or social justice activism (and two moved to Tasmania following direct action

experience on the mainland), they did not join the Tasmanian campaigns with a fully formed intention to become radical activists. Most of them were either Tasmanian residents or visiting Tasmania when they met someone, either a friend or an acquaintance, who introduced them to Tasmania's old growth forests. It was at that point that they experienced something that affected them strongly enough to join the campaign. Matilda's account is typical of the forest activist's journey:

John Well, perhaps you'd be kind enough to tell me about your journey to the Florentine, or to the Tasmanian forests.

Matilda It's a very simple story. I came down to work at the Falls Festival for the second year. That would have been 2004/2005. After the festival one of my friends who had moved down here, and another friend who I'd met down here, took me out to the Styx Valley for three days when there was still a camp, which was the remnants of the Global Rescue Station camp at that point. They took me out to the Styx and my friend (name) took me walking through a coupe which is now lost, which was destroyed in late 2007. But I'd just never seen a landscape anything like this, and I've travelled all across the world, and I've been to some phenomenal places, but the Styx Valley and this little patch of the Styx up off Waterfall Creek really just grabbed me. So, I returned to the mainland after three days and then I was back two weeks later.

Yeah. I just was - I suppose, seeing these incredible forests, which I couldn't - had no chance of adequately describing to any of my friends on the mainland, they were just so phenomenal. And then seeing what was being done to them. And it was like someone had got my heart in a headlock. I didn't really feel like I had any choice but to come back and see what was going on. So, that was sort of it really.

Once again, Matilda, like the whaling activists, has experienced something in her encounter with nature that affects her profoundly, and which in her case she interprets as the forest literally requiring her to defend it.

In another example the path to activism occurs during a difficult period in the participant's life. Sophie was unhappy in her job. She decided to move

to Tasmania and shortly after arriving she met someone who took her to a blockade camp in the Weld forests.

Sophie I think within about three days of coming here I ran into friends of friends who were going to this thing on parliament lawns. And there was a girl there, and she was like I'm going out to this camp do you want to come? And I said yes and that was the Weld and so I didn't leave that camp for the next year and a half.

John Is that right so you're straight into those forests then so what was it like arriving in the Weld tell me about that?

Sophie It was pretty magical so at that point we had to walk. It was seven Ks [kilometres] from the gate and we walked through clearfells and plantation most of that for seven Ks. And we went at night. It was quite a big moon that night, and so you could sense that there was openness, and like not much going on around you. There was enough light to see so we were walking, and then we started walking like down through this clearfell, along a muddy track, and then turned into forest, and into a clearfell, and we were walking beneath the ferns with moonlight shining through, and walking across some creeks, and came around a corner and there was like a little choir and one person who was up. It was all a bit full on when you turn up to a blockade in the middle of the night, but it was amazing and I was just like, "ah yeah, this feels good." I was meant to stay in this forest for a couple of days and didn't, I didn't leave.

Stories such as Sophie's and Matilda's are told many times by the forest activists whom I interviewed. Something happens during the person's first encounter with the forests that compels them to stay and join the campaign. While they might have had previous experience and be sympathetic to direct action, it is the experience of encountering the forest, and the forest activists already participating in the campaign, that gives rise to a decision to act (see also Bunting-Howarth et al 2009). Experiences such as these are the subject of the following section, but before moving on, not all forest activists experienced such a sudden transformation. Dan's, for example was more gradual and, resonating with the accounts given by whaling activists, his transformation was borne out of a sense of injustice at

the style of forestry undertaken in Tasmania. Even so, he experienced an epiphany, although it did not arise from an encounter with old growth forest. Dan had been driving with friends, nine months after his first encounters with forest activists.

Dan We've come over this one hill and the whole time it had been strip, a 20 metre wide strip along either side of the road, which wouldn't allow you to see what was going on the other side [a strip is a margin of mature trees either side of the road that conceals the clearfells from travellers]. But my friend decided to take this logging track off to the right and we travelled for about 30 metres and then I could see to the distance to three, maybe four hills, going over each other and it was all clearfells. Every single thing, and something happened right there and then. Something, the whole way that I had found out about it, the way that they had hidden it from sight on the lower end, the way that it was just, so absolutely indiscriminate, there was no respect or no understanding and no appreciation for the intenseness diversity and ecological knowledge that's stored in this place, it was gone.

It was gone, there was nothing and at that time, we are going back to 2003, 2004, they had 1080 in there, the poison baits and could see them. I see the blue carrots when I was walking, there were little pieces of blue carrot that they had and I was about to pick one up and my friend stopped me went, "no, no that's poison," and I was like, 'why are they leaving it around here', and he said, 'it's to kill the animals.' I knew a little bit about different fertilisers and poisons and pesticides and I said, "hang on a sec, this is the worst poison possible to use on them. It's a very long drawn out death. They're haemorrhaging and having strokes and all this while it's happening." And he said, "yes, that's precisely what happens".

So there was that and once again there was something really offensive to me about that 20 metre buffer strip on the side of the road and the way they were concealing it from the people who owned it, it's ours. It doesn't matter, we might not be aboriginals anymore, but we are born here and we breathe this air and we are going to die here and this is ours, our kids are going to be raised here and to hide it from us, that offended me and I think that was the beginning.

Dan takes offence at what he feels is being done in his name, but which is concealed from him. This is a betrayal and he becomes more angry when he returns home and learns why the forest had been clear-felled:

It was cheating nature, it was cheating the environment, it was cheating all those and for what, toilet paper? At that time, when I looked up those coups and who was taking them, where the sales had been, it was Gunn's that made those sales straight to a toilet paper manufacturing paper company in Japan and I was just like, it just didn't compute. It was like the most disrespectful thing you could possibly do. It wasn't you know, they might actually be spending and employing hundreds of people to come up with this grand piece of parchment that they were then going to inscribe with whatever knowledge that they possessed and keep it locked up somewhere. It was toilet paper. You are going to make this amount of refuse that it was just incredible, it was absolutely incredible and I think I got really angry.

The whaling and forest participants' journey into activism has emotional and cognitive dimensions. A recurrent theme emerging in these accounts is the transformational aspect of experiences of nature. They are experiences that generate passion for a place or an ideal, a passion that seems similar to the kinds of passion that underlies, in Weber's analysis, political vocation (Weber 1919), also see Barbalet, (2008: 61-63).

The contrast between the participant's usually urban home environment and the ocean or forest heightens the participant's embodied sensitivity to the experience. This echoes Robert Macfarlane who, describing his walk on tidal flats off East Anglia writes "I recall thought becoming sensational; the substance of the landscape so influencing mind that mind's own substance was altered" (Macfarlane 2012: 75). There is something metaphorical or even mythological about the participants' first encounters with the nature they are engaged in defending.

THE VALUE OF DIRECT ACTION

Many participants reflected upon what they had learned about the use of direct action as a campaign strategy or tactic. While some stories could be interpreted as merely a rationalisation or justification of direct action, my interest in them is the insights they provide about the contribution that experiences of direct action make to self-identity formation. Will is one of the few activists who spoke about how his activism encouraged him to read deeply about environmental philosophy, particularly Deep Ecology, and then integrate that into his understanding of his role as an activist. This story begins with Will discussing Deep Ecology and then explaining the link between that and his activism.

John So what is it about Deep Ecology that makes sense to you or sort of resonates?

Will I guess it was this articulation of our connection with nature. Our intimate, intricate and undeniable connection and the basic principles that we, as a human industrial society, are destroying that connection. John had this saying, it's like our brain has decided that it can make money from mining our liver and it goes ahead and does that despite the detrimental impact on our bodies.

John So he gave a sort of underlying rationale from that sort of framework?

Will He did and it had people like John Seed, his breadth and experience into direct action and in environmental education, and then you had Arne Naess who was one of the youngest professors of philosophy in Norway, a world respected philosopher and so it had a credibility to it as well in a philosophical sense so it was really refreshing.

John That really makes sense because a lot of what you've told me is about the kind of relationships with the people who are engaged in that. One of the things I'm trying to understand is how people move from a kind of theoretical realisation that this needs to be saved but continue to get on with their daily life. It's a much more stronger sort of determination to defend nature.

Will And that's what gave me that strength because I had something positive to contemplate and to focus on outside of my direct action work or forest campaign work. I bought as many books as I could on the issue. I downloaded all the articles I could online from the Trumpeter magazine and so it was

great. I went working in Byron, and experienced another great moment, there was actually a forest near where I lived, Nullum State Forest which is actually now a national park, was being logged. It had 52 endangered species in it, including the koala, so it was a beautiful forest and one of the locals had rung the Byron Environment Centre and said we've just heard chainsaws or something there, what's going on and so it was the first time I'd actually organised a blockade.

It was my first time. I basically got my housemates and networks of friends and people from the environment centre and we organised our own blockade to the point where I was almost doing everything. I got thrown into the media role so it was first time I did radio, my first time I did TV and I pulled back my dreadlocks at the time and I put on a collared shirt and stood out in the forest and articulated what was wrong. Funny, I just stepped into it because there was no-one else. I sat on top of a tripod because there was only six or seven of us to call.

We had locals come in and out, so I was doing everything and actually it was my first win too. We got a suspension of logging because we found koala scats at the bottom of a tree so they put off the logging and now the place is protected, through a range of processes that occurred later and I guess for me that was a core part of what I was doing, was that. Holding things back for the moment until perhaps society catches up with the ecological values that these places have.

It seems that Will has found in Deep Ecology and environmental ethics an intellectual framework to complement his deeply felt compulsion to defend (in this example) the northeast New South Wales forests (see also his stories in the previous chapter). He also experiences the first direct action campaign that he organises and leads. The campaign successfully secures a halt on logging and the forest is ultimately saved. While it is a last chance to prevent destruction, Will recognises that a value of direct action lies in its ability to stop environmental destruction and allow slower bureaucratic and legal processes to recognise that the old growth forest has values other than the one off sale of timber. This story was told about an early stage in Will's activist career before he moved to Tasmania to play a leading role there.

The experience seems to have been significant for him in authenticating his identity as a radical environmentalist.

The following story also explains the value of direct action to halt environmental harms in order to allow the ‘world to catch up’.

Pete You can’t just like turn up and spend heaps of time and energy trying to protect an area and think you’re actually going to save it. The way I see it is it’s more you blockade an area, you campaign for an area, you do everything that you can for an area. But really at the end of the day you know that area’s going to be logged. But the work that you’ve done for that area has listed the profile of forests in general as a whole and also you’ve slowed them down here for X amount of time. Therefore they haven’t been able to go over there and if you can just slow (pause) that’s the whole idea I guess behind blockading is if you can slow them and slow them and slow them and slow them, eventually the world will catch up and there’ll be a time when they’ll go “okay, no more.” And the Florentine is the perfect example because if that blockade hadn’t been there 1,000 hectares of that forest would’ve been cleared. Only 15 hectares has and you can attribute that directly to the blockade and now things are changing.

Framing the value of direct action as a method to enable society to catch up is obviously very attractive to campaigners as these excerpts demonstrate. But such actions “tread a fine line between drawing attention to threatened areas and provoking resentment that can ultimately backfire against the forest” (Krien 2010: 32). The 2009 ‘bust’ of the Florentine by the Tasmanian police, can also be understood as a state-initiated response to quash camp Floz’s existence as an illicit and embarrassing protest about the state’s forestry policies.

Henry’s decision to become involved in direct action is in part a reaction to his father’s experience as a park ranger whose efforts to achieve environmental outcomes were constrained by the bureaucratic processes of government administration. He is attracted to the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, as a means of advancing whale conservation, because

he calculates that working outside the system will achieve immediate conservation gains. His involvement will achieve immediate conservation gains. His motivation seems to be a combination of frustration with the time taken to achieve change conventionally, and his strong sense of moral obligation to, having recognised a problem, do something.

Henry I was watching my father working for Parks and Wildlife Service and just getting swamped in this sea of bureaucracy and never being able to (pause) telling me all these ideas for conservation on Fraser Island, but never being able to get anywhere because he was stuck in a political quagmire and you just can get out of that politicised bureaucratic system. And then you see an organisation like Paul set up, like Sea Shepherd that just goes, is a direct action group that is out there physically and definitely making a difference that you can see, feel, touch. There is an active ingredient there that isn't like, oh ten years down the track we might protect those trees. It's like, no we're going to protect these whales now. We're going to do it now and we're going to be there with our ships and we'll do it. And that really appealed to me, because the time... you know, we talk about global warming, all these issues and everyone talks about twenty years, fifteen years, fifty years. There's no action happening now.

I just thought it's my duty to (pause) you can't sit around. Sitting on your chair writing plans about how you are going to deal with it, you need to get out there and make a difference on the issue.

John So you felt the need to act?

Henry Yeah. I just felt this really strong desire to actually just do something about it. No matter how big or small. Whether it's going out there and cleaning up the beach everyday, it's just a desire not to sit there and philosophise and say, "wouldn't it be nice if we lived in a world where people didn't throw their rubbish on the beach." But to actually be, "I'm the person that lives in the world that cleans up the beach".

John So you've got a real sense of personal responsibility?

Henry Yeah, yeah it is. It is. But it's a moral, in my opinion, it's a moral obligation as a global citizen to do your part to protect the planet.

The experience of moral obligation to do something also drives Jack's determination to become a whaling activist. He seems to have a sense of personal responsibility to stop something he judges is wrong and direct action is a way of achieving this.

John What was it about the direct action that attracted you?

Jack Well, you can always see people when they're upset about something and they go and they do these big protests and big yelling and holding up signs. I almost feel like, it does do a little bit, but I feel I need to do more than just sit and hold up a sign. I need to actively go and (pause) For example the whaling thing. You can't just sit on a street corner and tell people about it. That's an important part, but one of the most important things for me personally, is going down there and making an attempt to stop it myself directly. Intervening with them.

John Why was it important that you should be the person who does that?

Jack I just feel very passionate about conserving wildlife and just like (pause) another thing that bothers me so much is how they can get away with breaking all these different laws, conservation laws. Nobody is doing a thing about it and so I just felt like I had a lot to give to Sea Shepherd. Yeah, I really wanted to go down and make an attempt to put a stop to it.

Ella highlights another element of the rewards of direct action compared with conventional processes: the tangible evidence that your activism, in this case whaling, has saved individuals. Witnessing a pod of whales that are alive, because she saved them, makes the sacrifice of normative or conventional social goals worthwhile.

Ella I know the day after we chased the Nisshin Maru – someone else probably said the same thing as well – but the day after, we went back down to where we found them to patrol and make sure (pause) because it was the only area with good weather in the whole Antarctic, so that was where they would be. But we thought they'd left, but we didn't know for sure. And we just stayed and patrolled that area. And then we saw these, I think they were fin whales, coming past. And if we hadn't been there, then the whalers would have been there and they would have been killed. And that was one, when they came

down and hailed us, we'd just seen all these whales going past and that really meant a lot. Just to know there's no doubt those whales would have been killed that day if we hadn't arrived the day before.

John Gosh, that must be immensely rewarding and satisfying.

Ella Really rewarding. Really rewarding. It makes it all worth it, all the seasickness that people get. All the hard long hours or having no money. Or being stuck in cold weather in the middle of the ocean for three months, that really makes it all worthwhile.

John And I guess turns it from an abstract idea into something really tangible, really real.

Ella Yeah, it makes it all definitely worth it.

John So in terms of Ella as the person she is, what does it mean to be an activist, or to be a Sea Shepherd activist? What do you think about who you are?

Ella I think, personally, I don't believe in afterlives or reincarnation or anything like that. So I believe we have one chance on this planet and it's not very long. And the majority of the world seems to be ruining it. So to be part of an organisation or any kind of environmental work is (pause) I think (pause) just to try and make the world a little bit of a better place and to do it with everything I have and with my time on this planet. I would rather be doing that, even if I'm poor and don't see my family for months. To know that I'm making a little bit of a difference and helping the planet in whatever small way that we are, or big way, than to sit and have a nine to five job and go to work, come back, watch TV and (stops)

John Yes, so it's much more meaningful, much more useful.

Ella Yeah, and 'cause it's so easy to do that. To go home. I could just fly home and get a job and have a nice easy life and have all the nice things. It's such a simple thing I could do, but then, when I'm old, what am I going to be proud of. What am I going to think – well, what did I do with my life? At least now I'm doing this, I know that I can (pause) at least one thing in my life I'm going to be really proud and say I tried. I did my part.

Ella's self-identity as an activist seems to be boosted by such confirmations of the value of her activism. She is also creating for herself a purpose and

autobiography that she will be proud of when she reflects upon what she did with her life.

Oliver's activism also looks to the future. He feels responsible for engaging in environmentally harmful practices that will negatively affect future generations.

Oliver I guess a big driver of my environmental activism is seeing the damage you are doing or have done in the past and that you've been conditioned by this society to consume in such a manner to do things that really come at a high cost to the environment, whether that's, you know, spend your whole life wearing leather shoes, you are eating meat, you've grown up eating meat. All the waste you produce. When you start to think about it you are like "wow!" It had such an impact. And I am ultimately part of this and responsible for the fact that my grandchildren, their children won't have stuff you know. And when you look in to the future when you have that long term, um, thought process that you're handing down something to future generations um it's quite upsetting to know that they won't have the things that they have.

Sophie expresses a similar sentiment of personal responsibility to correct her own (and her species'), bad decisions.

John One of the things I'm keen to know is what sort of being an activist means to you, what's it like being an activist in terms of the person you are now?

Sophie I think it's important to me to take on responsibility for (pause) I am a person living on this world, there are things that I see that I don't particularly find good for our survival, for generations to come survival, and I feel like I have a responsibility to say, "hey I don't think that's actually right." Because I'm going to get wired at this point, when the world is catastrophically predicted to change, and there are things that we can do now to mitigate that, and if I didn't say that's going to happen, and we can do this and change it well then I deserve that fate. You know, I'm going to take some responsibility for being a human.

Direct action, for the participants I interviewed, seems to be an avenue for them to meet, through action, their sense of personal responsibility to stop

environmental harms. Direct action is recognised by the participants as a last resort and as a tactic that slows the pace of environmentally harmful practices, while slower conventional political and legal processes hopefully achieve environmental protection. These however seem to be secondary considerations. The advantages of direct action, for the participants, are that it provides immediate, tangible results (notwithstanding the failures of many direct actions) and a demonstration to themselves and others that they are doing something (see also Chapter 6 on the value of community). Ruby told me, “we are the heroes who save the world. That’s awesome. That’s not a sense of oppressive responsibility, that’s a call to adventure!”

CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES OF NATURE

Participants were asked about childhood interactions with nature that they thought, on reflection, might have influenced their choices. There was a variety of responses, ranging from little to no contact, to a childhood growing up in the bush. I did not draw any conclusions about the significance of childhood experiences in general, but was interested in the participant’s reflections upon the importance of the experience to their journey. Emily, who is an experienced tree-sitter, reflected upon the first tree she witnessed being cut down as a child:

Emily I was just talking this morning actually about my first experience of a tree being cut down, which was when I was little, I had this tree outside my bedroom window and I really loved it. It was a bottlebrush and it brought all the birds and stuff out there. And the neighbours [wanted it down] because the roots were going under their house. And my parents had to get it cut down. But I was very - I didn't understand. I thought they were siding with the neighbours and not me, and I was very upset about it. Yeah, I was reflecting on that this morning actually, that was my first (pause)

John First tree protest.

Emily It was such a devastation. I didn't do a tree-sit in it, but I was very upset. But yeah, we had a lot of trees. We had, like, a mango tree and an avocado tree,

and different trees that I really liked. I really liked those trees, so I guess that's my only experience that I can reflect on, because we didn't really have any other - we didn't go bushwalking, we didn't go camping, we didn't really do anything like that.

Several participants spent their childhood in or near areas of bushland, where they played. As is often the case in Australia, many participants recalled holidays at the beach or camping in the bush. It may be that family preferences for beach or bush camping might have influenced the choice to become a whaling or forest activist. Ava, for example, played in woodlands bordering her childhood home in Lindisfarne (a suburb of Hobart). But it was visiting Russell Falls, in Mt Field National Park, that stood out for her as significant:

Ava I can remember going to Russell Falls. I am not sure how old I was but I remember it vividly. It was green and lush. It felt good, more than dry bush, or, you know, sort of scrubby bush.

John Right because it is a kind of oasis there isn't it?

Ava Yeah, and we lived for five years in my early teens in Lindisfarne. We were on the back of the bush reserve. Every day to go to school I had to walk through this bush track to go to school, which was pretty good. Um, yeah, I can remember vividly the rainforest as a kid. Walking to school in just scrubby bush as a kid. I suppose it was important but it doesn't have the same impact, thinking back, that the rainforest, as opposed to I just walk to school through the bush. Yeah, rainforest is definitely my thing.

Reflecting further on why she had chosen the Florentine, Ava recalled again her visit to Russell Falls:

.... and it was lush and green and peaceful and quiet. And you could hear birds. It was like, some people hear musical instruments and they prefer some to others. That was like the soul and the sounds and the water and the calm, it was the pitch that was good to my ear. (So it really worked) Yeah, it was. (pause) It was all senses. Yeah, it was pretty cool.

Other participants gave anecdotes of experiences of nature as children that varied in complexity and apparent significance to the teller. Whether or not childhood experiences of nature affect a person's choice of future campaign, deserves further investigation. Perhaps what is more relevant to this inquiry is to ask, "what is the nature of experiences such as these that leave such an indelible impression upon the person?" The importance of this story is not that it is set in the participant's childhood, but that it holds real significance for her. Her description provides a clue: it is an embodied experience, which is engaging her attention completely and that challenges her to reconfigure her understanding of the world. Experiences such as these are reported again and again, several of which are included in the following chapters.

CONCLUSIONS

The participants gave unique accounts of their journeys into radical activism. Patterns are discernable, however. Many participants had previous activism experience. Typically the participants are introduced to the activist campaign by a friend or acquaintance and they may be attracted to the activist community and lifestyle. They have experiences that lead to the conviction that the particular nature being defended is worth dedicating themselves to. With respect to the whaling activists, this conviction may be developed over a significant period of time before they have embarked on an activist campaign. Sometimes commitment arises from a developing awareness of social justice issues, that is translated across to justice for non-humans. But it is not unusual to also experience an epiphanic encounter with nature that propels them into activism. Forest activists seem to enter the forest and have a similar encounter or experience that leads to activism. They have received less attention in this chapter because the kinds of experiences they describe are discussed in the next chapter.

This chapter, while in many respects a framing part of the interview, is already suggesting analytical themes. Encounters with nature are significant

in the participants' life course; nature is experienced and interpreted as acting upon them. Many participants reported experiences that are pivotal or epiphanic, that is, that are transformative. The participants may re-conceptualise animals as individuals with intelligence, personality and rights, who in some cases may be recognised in animist terms. This revised appreciation of the non-human is consistent with the communities of activists they join. Finally, the participants are telling stories that reveal a strong sense of their own responsibility to act, sometimes in the absence of effective action by others.

Chapter 9 The transcendent power of nature

Stories about the participants' journeys into activism were presented in the previous chapter. They are stories by which the participants explain how they became radical environmentalists. This chapter presents the first of several analytical categories that elucidate an essential aspect of the participants' lived experience as activists. The task is to "construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience" (van Manen 1990:41) and describe it so that we recognize it as "an experience that we have had or could have had" (van Manen 1990: 27). The analysis lies in the identification of the experiential themes and exemplar stories, rather than alternative forms of analysis, such as the identification of conceptual categories by which activist culture(s) can be distinguished from other social groups and cultures.

All participants were asked about whether they had experienced a pivotal moment that determined their future course and several of these have been presented above. Participants, as they reviewed their autobiography, describe these interactions with non-human nature as pivotal because of their influence on their life and self-identity. But why are they so important, or why are they given such importance at least, when the participant creates a story as a response to my question? Participant stories suggest that, in part, these moments are a manifestation of their encounter with and recognition of nature's power. This is often described as a confrontation with their relative insignificance, spatially and over time. An old growth tree, for example, may be several centuries old compared to which the human span is so small. The forces that one witnesses in the southern ocean, during a storm perhaps, or witnessing its vastness may be confronting at an existential level. While a separate concept, this experience

also seems to happen concurrently with experiences of nature as transcendent. This experience is significant in the participants' accounts of themselves because recognition of the power, the scale and the complexity of ecosystems such as forests and oceans can give rise to new understandings of their place in nature.

Pete was describing the experience of communicating with a landscape as the development of a narrative

Pete I think you just subtly. (pause) Perhaps if you go for a big walk for a couple of weeks through a landscape you'll develop a narrative with the landscape just from walking through it. And it's a subtle narrative, it's not a spoken narrative, it's not spoken communication. But you'll have moments within that experience where the sun is shining on you, and you've got this incredible weather, and you've found this ridgeline to make for easy walking to get to where you want to go, and everything is just going your way. And then you'll have other elements where nature is just absolutely shitting on you and it's like "This is horrible!" And then you'll have other moments where you might be stuck somewhere, a river will rise and you won't be able to get anywhere and you'll be like "Shit I'm stuck here!"

I guess that's all part of this narrative and I don't necessarily know what that narrative's trying to say but the thing that I really like about it is I like feeling really small and insignificant and completely just at the mercy of the landscape. You take the good with the bad, and you appreciate that open clear sunny time when you found that ridgeline and it put you four Ks further than you thought you could get that day. And then you had this perfect campsite with perfect weather, and you didn't pitch the tent. And you appreciate that because you know in a few days you might be going through a blizzard and getting lost, and you'll find some patch of scrub that you'll crawl through and you'll be reduced to tears.

It's just part of the whole. (pause) Yeah, I like feeling insignificant because I think humans, we always think we're better than everything, always think everything's there to serve us and they're our resources, we need to use those resources because they're ours. They're just sitting there, they're not doing

anything. But then you might go down to the south west [Tasmanian World Heritage Wilderness Area] and you are nothing.

For Pete the narrative is borne through interaction with the landscape. He seems to revel in the dynamic power of nature, a power that renders him insignificant. His sense of self as a human is rooted in his relationship with nature, and he seeks time in wild nature to remind himself of what it is to be human and alive.

That landscapes can shape a person is nothing new of course, and Pete's description of the capacity of landscape to affect a person forms part of a Western cultural tradition of engagement with wild places that is a product of the Enlightenment tradition. Pete's experience of nature as dynamic, rather than passive, resonates with MacFarlane's rumination on the human landscape relationship. Landscape, he writes,

is not the passive object of our gaze, but rather a volatile participant - a fellow subject which arches and bristles at us, bristles into us. Landscape is still often understood as a noun connoting fixity, scenery, an immobile painterly decorum. I prefer to think of the word as a noun containing a hidden verb: landscape scapes, it is dynamic and commotion causing, it sculps and shapes us not only over the courses of our lives but also instant by instant, incident by incident. I prefer to take 'landscape' as a collective term for the temperature and pressure of the air, the fall of light and its rebounds, the textures and surfaces of rock, soil and building, the sounds (cricket screech, bird cry, wind through trees), the scents (pine resin, hot stone, crushed thyme) and the uncountable other transitory phenomena and atmospheres that together comprise the *bristling* presence of a particular place at a particular moment (Macfarlane 2012: 254-5).

Dan's experience of old growth forest is intoxicating and overwhelming. For him it is not just the scale of the trees, which he has just described, but the complexity of the ecosystem, which he understands as some kind of information network and uses such a vocabulary to describe his experience. It is from this source of information that Dan claims is the source of identity.

Dan It was extremely mystical and it was a profoundly religious experience being there. (pause) There was so much knowledge around me. There was so much life around me. I've been in libraries but it was unadulterated life and knowledge, it was just incredible. I didn't have to think about whether this had come from someone's opinion or whether there was some bias attached to it or whether there were vested interests. Here was, what is and that was it and it was incredible. It was absolutely incredible. Once again, I can't get over that, I can't get over that appreciation for what this actually is and what it means to us because here is a vast storehouse of information and from information comes identity. If we don't have this vast storehouse of information and appreciation and connectivity, who are we? What are we doing? It's fine for us to go and consume as much as we want, that's why I'm not saying that consumerism must end or capitalism must end, but to what end? Is it just merely to consume? No, but here was something that could tell us. It could tell me where things have gone, I might be able to receive some underlying logic there for myself and it was everything. All of man's political structures were evident to me in a 25 by 25 metre area.

John So tell me a bit more about that.

Dan I saw symbioses. I saw active paralytic parasitism. I saw conflict. I saw community. I saw just the interweaving wildness of it all, and I think it was a couple of days after that I started talking to my friends about the concepts of the global parliament. Because camp fires are great for discussions and things like that, and sometimes when you're wet and cold and you've got nothing to do except to wait for police and loggers to turn up you start talking politics and other things around you. I honestly don't think that I would have an appreciation of where the human brain could go, and that was another thing that I noticed. So I was there, I was having this amazing moment and all these profound things were just blasting my brain, I wasn't able to grasp then, I had

a lie down and I looked up to this tree and because of wind it had grown mostly towards one side so it's branches were coming out and I couldn't help but think that was the spinal column and the top part with all the branches were a brain that were constantly collecting information and then other people see it as lungs. Like the little alveoli, and that verified literally alveoli, the first breathing mechanism, but with me I just couldn't help but think there was a massive brain and it was connected into some sort of central neuro-cortex of the earth and it was living. It was actively thinking, renewing, responding.

The numinous qualities of this experience are transformative and it remains a peak experience in Dan's autobiography, one that has shaped his understanding of nature, of himself and his commitment to activism. His account is akin to a religious enlightenment, combining as it does, sensual, mystical and intellectual elements that completely alter his perception and understanding of the rainforest (also mediated, perhaps, by his camp fire conversations with his companions). Dan recognises the intoxicating quality of this experience and reassures me that he was not using intoxicants:

Dan ...it was a really profound experience and as I said, it was absolutely unadulterated. There was no intoxicants involved, there hadn't been any intoxicants involved days before or after or anything like that, it was really nothing else it could be attributed to and I've tried, for the last eight years, I've tried to demystify this whole thing but I can't. It was an amazing, mystical, religious, profound, intellectual, psychological, philosophical event.

Dan's awe at the rainforest and his sense that it has spiritual qualities interestingly hindered his ability to feel connected with it (a theme explored further in the next chapter). This sense of connection finally arose through him being arrested.

Dan I'd had this dawning of, this is amazing, it's incredible, it's holy, it's needs to be revered, it needs to be looked after and protected. And in some ways I went down the path of putting everything on a pedestal. So even though I was

realising I was part of this nature that I'd found, I was still for some reason, because I was just awed, I was in absolute awe and I was in love with it. So I put it on a pedestal, which is a very human thing to do. And so I separate myself from it in a way, even though I was starting to understand that I was more a part of it than I ever was, quite convoluted in that way, in the way I was acting towards it and for it.

But I guess I always did feel a bit alienated, and I do still feel a bit alien in rain forests, in big dense rain forests where I understand what the effect of my footsteps is like in five to six hundred year old moss there, that fungal growth that they easily, at the heart of that fungal growth and the age of the spores and you go back to it, could easily be three or four thousand years old. It's very hard to know what we are damaging and it takes a while, especially with the Florentine. It took me a while to be able to call it home, and I guess we'll come back to this later, but for me to call the Florentine home took me actually being arrested there and making that sort of connection.

Other participants reported experiences of the richness of life in the forests. While intellectually the participants realise that nature is filled with different species and material networks, the physical experience of the forest as alive can be felt profoundly. I asked Mia to tell me about a time when she became aware of the forests as a community. She told me this story.

Mia Yeah, so certainly there was one experience after I had been going out there for a year on and off, when I was at camp with one other person and I was woken up by log trucks. Because it was the end of the weekend and the Monday morning about four o'clock the log trucks came down (John Yes) and it was still pitch black and then I couldn't get back to sleep. So soon after that the sun started to rise and so it slowly started to change from that point of being like pitch black. Which was like an incredible darkness, which you would know from being outside of cities. That kind of darkness is really quite fundamental and can be quite amazing and the stars especially were so incredible. So it's kind of like I am awake but it's not too bad, you know? (John Yes) But, as the sun came up everything started to come alive. The trees started to come, I could see the trees moving and it was like the trees everywhere gently moving, moving all over. And the birds started singing.

And that was quite like, um, quite a profound moment for me. Because when I started thinking, “what are these birds saying to each other?” Because they were communicating and it is kind of hard to explain, but, I felt like that, that the place was so thriving with life.

And that’s what sometimes is, is really hard to convey when you are talking about a location like the Florentine, which is controversially viewed in certain ways and viewed as a crop that can be harvested. That it’s really hard to express how full of life it is. And not just the birds that I can hear, but all the tiny insects and all of the micro-bacteria and, you know, the soil, everything that’s in the soil, the worms and the trees. All the way up to the tops of the trees where the birds are hanging out and the trees are kind of like moving. So I felt like it was just absolutely teeming with life. I felt a sense that you can’t really put into words about how vital it was there.

John Yes, yeah. A very profound experience.

Mia Yes and really about the fact that I felt I was surrounded by this community. And that it was very much a community in the same way that human communities are.

John Is that right?

Mia Yeah. Not in the same way, but in a comparable way that’s just as important, if you know what I mean.

John And so you are feeling? Oh, gosh that’s just so rich isn’t it? (Both laugh). Blimey, where to go. One of the ways to go is to get a sense, like you are feeling part of that community at that time or an observer?

Mia Yes, because we were saying about romanticising. I wouldn’t want to say that it was um, you know, that you can’t have a similar sense of wonder and amazement about how vital the world is sitting here in the middle of the city as you can out there. But it is different. (John Yes, okay.) I guess I felt like I was maybe, like I was, had come into part of a different community, but very temporarily.

John Yes, so you are aware of the temporary nature of it.

Mia Yeah, and it was very much at that time between darkness and light. You know when the sun actually comes up and the birds kind of go on their way and get on with what they are doing. I don’t know, it’s hard to say. I guess, I

didn't feel like it was a community I shouldn't be a part of, but it was one that I am generally not. Just for the practicality reasons.

John But you also talk about a sense of how rich it is. Not just in terms of life, but importance?

Mia I guess so. I think the thing for me was in terms of life, because it felt to me. Um. It made it so much stronger for me, the idea that destroying that area is comparable to destroying a human habitat, in terms of how outraged people would be if you took, like, a slum dwelling somewhere and raised it to the ground. And said, "everyone leave here and take your luck," you know, running off in all directions. That's how it felt for me; somewhere, you know, a non-human community.

John Yes, I think I understand. How does that kind of experience affect your sense of who you are? If it does at all.

Mia It definitely does and I think it is cumulative really. That was a very incredible moment and I just felt really lucky, I felt really blessed. And it's very humbling to remember that you are part of something that is really a huge ecosystem. A huge system of interactions and relationships where different elements respond and interact with one another. So it can be kind of tough to remember that you are (pause). But in some ways it's kind of comforting to remember that you are part of a bigger thing (John Yes). Part of a bigger system or organised chaos. However nature works, I'm not really sure. You can understand it scientifically but there's all layers to this world we live in.

Mia situates this story in the Florentine in the pitch dark of night. She emphasises that she feels there is no human-made filter between her and the cosmos; she is in elemental nature. As the new day begins the forest awakes. Mia experiences her own awakening as she observes birds communicating and senses the forest teeming with life. The forest gains a vitality that had been absent prior to this experience. She likens the forest community to a human community or settlement, the destruction of which is unjust and abhorrent.

She also recognises that these kinds of experiences are unavailable to her in her urban life: they arise through interaction with the forest. When asked

about how experiences like this change her self-identity, she explains that it is transcendent and that she realises that her feeling of insignificance, which is threatening, is compensated by the realisation that she is part of a relational system of human and non-human communities (nature) that is much bigger than herself.

This experience happened a year into Mia's engagement with the Florentine. Several participants described how important spending time was in the forests to begin to understand it better. Engagement with a place deepens over time, a not unexpected phenomenon. Mia's example suggests that it is important because the person develops skills that enable her to become more aware of her environment. Is it possible also that the timing of her experience is significant; that her sensitivity to changes in her environment, wrought by the sun's rising and the forest awakening, is heightened? Mia's story indicates a level of attentiveness to her surroundings, that perhaps she did not have when she first engaged with the Florentine. This is consistent with habituation to any new environment or skill set that one is engaged with learning. At first one is overwhelmed and can only process a few things at a time, but with practice competency increases and many functions seem to become automatic as they require less attention from the conscious mind. With practice one obtains the ability to see a greater depth of field and resolution. The experience of increased perception can also give rise to a different categorization of the forest community. In Mia's case, her experience of moving out of the human community into a non-human community that morning, gave rise to a new way of understanding the forest:

Mia You can understand the idea of non-human people logically or rationally, but then I really felt that time that this was (pause) Um, that I just knew that this was a community of non-human people of all kinds. Not just animal kind, like plant and that kind of stuff.

Dan also described the gaining of practical bush skills that enabled him to navigate the forests and evade police without being detected:

Dan We knew it like the back of our hands. We could lead the police and the forest workers 15 metres into the bush and they would be lost because we had just run rings around them and used paths and just disorientated them, if we had to ... and there were a few searchers that were just lost in there, and they hadn't actually come out and we go, "no, it's that way," and we helped them out, and it was an interesting situation.

The participants' skills are practical and relational. They are achieved through time spent in the nature they are defending. They are the results of an active engagement with nature (what Ingold (2000) calls a 'dwelling perspective'), which affects perception and self-identity.

Not everyone reported such pleasant experiences of transcendence and the power of nature. Ava had an experience that caused her to flee the Florentine for several months.

Ava I can tell you an amazing story. (John please) ... It was incredibly windy. September, October are the windy months in Tasmania. Yeah, it was, um, I suppose about a 30 hour patch, there was wind and stuff. ... we were sleeping in the hut, eating our dinner, when a branch fell from the, I think it's called the Guardian Tree, right next to the hut. A branch that was about four inches and about ten foot long, sort of bounced off the edge of the hut, we were sitting under the tarps and then bounced on the ground and it was like that just gave us all a start, and we might go and sit down the front of the hut for the rest of the night and that was fine. So about midnight I was getting tired, I might go to bed. (Name) and co were there and said, "Oh, we are going to sleep in the hut. Are you going to be alright in the tent?" And I said, "Yeah, it will be fine." So, I got um, went into my tent and went to sleep.

My tent was quite far back into the forest. Um, and they both decided to sleep in the front hut that night. And, yeah, um, three hours later, at three am, I heard, "Woosh," and the whole ground just shook. And one minute I was asleep and the next minute I was awake. And I heard it, and my heart was jumping out of its chest (John I can imagine). I just went to pure shock. It was

just (pause) I literally had to sit there and touch my body from top to bottom and say, "Yes, I am in one piece. I'm okay" and I had to sit there and go, "It's okay, I'm fine." Even though I was telling myself that, it was just this, whole shock. So, after a while [name] and [name] came and said, "Are you alright Ava?" "I'm alive. I'm not sure if I'm ok." "The fire's going. Do you want to come and sit at the fire?" "Yes I think I do actually." (Laughs).

It had been snowing and hailing for, like, twenty four hours, so we were actually snowed in. Hail is good. It falls through the canopy. The snow stays in the canopy. The wind and the heaviness of the snow, I think, was the problem. ... I was in shock and sitting there near the fire and listening to the wind. It was just a jet engine, you can hear it coming and it's just, wow.

We went to see if we could find the tree that had fallen down. And we did. It was a five to six hundred year old eucalypt that had fallen down and taken nine other trees and thirty man ferns with it when it went. It left quite a big hole in the forest and the last tree it took down was a myrtle a bit over a metre wide. It was one of those ones that has two trunks. It took out half of that, and that obliterated a man fern ten metres away from my tent. So no wonder I felt it. In a crisis my brain goes into business mode. It's like, do what you need to do and then, once you are home, fall apart later. (John Yes, react then.) Yeah, fall apart later. You have to do a, b, c at this point and keep going. My son, it freaked him out a bit. And it was like you know, "Why's the forest after us."

John Oh, so that's how he interpreted it? That's interesting.

Ava Yeah, and I was like, "Ok, what are you trying to teach me? Why, this happened for a reason, what is it that you are trying to teach me? I have sort of worked out, but it's taken me until the last couple of months to work it out. It's a whole mortality type thing and that sort of stuff. ...

I understand now, that because (name) and (name) didn't freak out the way I did, it wasn't their lesson to learn. So, they were like shocked and surprised, but after a day or so that disappeared. But, I was never actually diagnosed, but I think I had post traumatic stress. It took me until Christmas Day to even be able to go back to the forest.

John Is that right? So it was a really frightening event?

Ava It was. ... I actually went back on Christmas Day. I was determined to go back on Christmas Day because they do Christmas in the traditional way. Um, but

the closer we got to the Florentine, I had [problems]. I actually got pulled over by one of the police as we were leaving that day as well. Everything from four wheel drives, to police, to wind, to things falling on my car and anyone tailgating me, freaked me out to the point that my knuckles, you know. All those automatic reactions that you have in a fight or flight situation. ... It was quite full on. ... The closer I got. Ah, look, I remember going through Maydena towards the Floz. I had white knuckle driving, because I was getting really stressed and frightened and tears coming down my face. But, I wanted, I was compelled. I had that compulsion that I had to go back. It was part of my healing, I wanted to be there to help the forests as well.

John Your commitment's still strong.

Ava Yeah, at first I didn't want to go back there at all. I didn't know if I was going to. But I thought, no I don't have to make that decision, just play it by ear and get through every day and every day it would get a bit easier and stuff. That was good. But, yeah, and I actually got out of the car and my knees were shaking and I found it hard to walk, my knees were shaking so much. Some people were aware of what was going on and stuff, and they were really good, and I'm saying, "Pretend I'm not here, I'm fine and if I burst into tears for no reason it's ok." Once I sat and was still. And it was a dead still day as well.

And the forest has been looking after me ever since. ... But Christmas Day I sat for half an hour, just deep breathing and telling myself I was calm and fine. And once I was calm I actually went to the tree and sat with the tree for a while. I had to make peace with the tree that fell and the one that nearly fell. I actually have a piece of the myrtle, because it splintered at the bottom. It's a piece about a foot round, a chunk, and with amazing patterns on it. Amazing patterns of the grain. So, I will just keep that and that will be my thing. But the thing that struck me because it had been from September to Christmas Day. All the man ferns had grown back. Things had started to sprout again (John Right). The first eucalypt that fell down, knocked the other stuff down. That was starting to sprout at its trunk and it was like, "Oh, ok things don't stop after that point. This is what it's about. It's about regeneration and, you know, the forest does it because it needs to regenerate. Trees get old, they fall, new things grow. Because my brain was stuck when it looked devastating it didn't even occur to me that I would go back and all these things would be growing back, so that was also about, you know, things move on and all that sort of stuff (Yes). So I think that helped ...

It was like, wow, ok, a bit of a light bulb moment. So literally I sat there and I cuddled the tree and watched the ants crawling up it and yeah, just made my peace.

This story is an account of the power of wild, untrammelled nature that she finds shockingly destructive, but ultimately creative. The felling of a mature eucalypt in the spring storm in the middle of the night destroys many other trees and tree ferns, almost extinguishing her in her tent. Her telling has a visceral quality, the listener can feel her puny scale and insignificance in the face of not just the scale of the tree itself, but also the natural processes that are occurring (an echo of which she reveals in her watching the Lilliputian ants crawling along the tree at the end of the story). Despite her insignificance, the interpretive frame has her firmly at the centre: she is being affected by the storm and it feels purposeful, connected to her in someway.

This existential threat affects her so deeply, that despite her desire to defend the forest, she feels unable to return for several months. The initial reaction to the storm is understandably egocentric: this is all about the storm being out to get her, it is personalised. But she notes that her response to the storm is different to other people who are not affected so strongly. She asks what the forest is trying to teach her. This orientation suggests a sense of connection and relationship with the place; she does not think of the forest as uninterested in her: she is looking upon it as teacher. At Christmas, her fear of returning is overcome by her desire to return. She reports a sympathetic response from the activists at the camp and from the forest itself. Witnessing the regeneration that has taken place since the storm, she decides her lesson is one about the cycle of creation, death and regeneration in which the forest ecosystem is engaged. It is as if she has realised that the forest, is bigger than the individuals themselves. While she might have known, cognitively, that the forest is an ecosystem, a network of parts and processes, she experiences this at the phenomenal level. She also

seems to recognise herself as a part of that ecosystem, and having made her peace, having accepted how the forest works, she feels looked after by the forest.

Finally, I am also interested in this account of a person who seems to place herself in a strongly asymmetrical relationship with the forest. She seems to place herself in a subordinate position to it, in the way that a student recognises the wisdom or authority of a teacher. Her orientation and her use of the expression “help the forests” to describe her contribution to the campaign, seems to suggest a different orientation to words such as ‘save’ or ‘protect’, words that would suggest a more paternalistic relationship with the forest. Her story is so powerful because, rather than driving her away, it has deepened her relationship with the forest. The turbulent storm, followed by the calm and peaceful regeneration, is mirrored by her own story of personal growth and the loving and humble stance to the forest that she now occupies.

Whaling activist narratives

Sea Shepherd participants also told stories of transcendent experiences of the Southern Ocean and the effects of those experiences upon them. Ella began her campaign as a crew member of the *Brigitte Bardot*. On 3 January 2012, during a storm, the trimaran’s port pontoon became partially separated from the boat. Most crew, including Ella, were transferred to the *Bob Barker* before the *Brigitte Bardot* was shepherded to the nearest port, Freemantle, 120 nautical miles away by another Sea Shepherd boat, the *Steve Irwin*.

John What was it like being in the Southern Ocean? Because I imagine that’s an environment different to anything.

Ella To begin with it wasn’t bad at all, across the transit. I can’t remember how long it took – maybe a month, two months to get from Europe to Australia. We went through a lot of different weather. We went through storms, we

went through calm sea, all types. We went slow, we went fast when we were going past Somalia – really fast. So to begin with it was just kind of normal, just going back to sea. It's quite rough. Then it got rougher.

Then it got (pause) the day before, or was it? It kind of merges together now, but when we were actually in that storm and the pontoon got smashed, they were like (pause) I've been through a lot of weather on that boat and never ever felt scared. It's always been like it's just waves, we're on a boat, it's fine, meet the swells. But I remember going up to the bridge on that one day and really thinking it doesn't look safe anymore. It was (pause) I can't remember, like eight, nine metre swells and every direction, it wasn't like coming at us (pause) I just had this, it's like it's indented on my mind, just this vision.

And I'd usually spend a lot of time on the bridge because in between cooking – because you can't relax on that boat in between shifts and that. You're either in bed, lying down 'cause it's rough or sit on the bridge and sit with people. And I couldn't stay on the bridge. I just went down to my bunk, I couldn't look out the window.

John It was so scary. Wow, so you've seen the ocean in extraordinary conditions.

Ella Yeah, so yeah, that was a strange experience. But I'm glad I've seen that, at the same time, and experienced it and we got through it and we were okay. And nothing serious happened. The boat got damaged but there was no way we were actually going to get hurt. The Bob was only eight hours away from us, so yeah.

John So in terms of your sense of what the ocean is or what nature is, how did that experience sort of affect...

Ella It made me realise that we're a very small part of this world. The oceans have some kind of power that we can't (pause). We're guests there. (pause) And I think that transpires to all kinds of nature and how humans really do abuse it so much and we think it's ours. Like everything on this planet is ours to take, like the forests in Tasmania and Australia and the fish and the whales. People think we're the main animal on this planet, so we can take it. And we need to realise that it's not ours and we shouldn't abuse it like we do. And that's my relationship with nature is that we really need to respect it.

John Yes, so I guess that was really brought home to you in that experience.

Ella And as opposed to animals, I don't see them as lower beings. It's not us and then them below us and we can do what we want. It's we should leave them alone because we have no right to mess with their lives.

In this story the participant also experiences the power of nature, a power that threatens to extinguish her. But her response is quite different to Ava's. The story Ella tells is very practical and seems to understate the scariness of the storm in the way she minimises the emotional impact of the experience. She has learned that humans are a very small part of the totality of earth and her respect for nature has increased. However, that she could have died is dealt with pragmatically. The experience of being a guest in this place (something qualitatively different to the depth of connection that Ava experiences in the forest) seems to strengthen her existing philosophical stance about humanity's exploitation of nature and the relationship she believes it should have.

Ethan was also on the *Brigitte Bardot* during that storm. He reflected upon the way his experiences of nature have changed him.

Ethan I guess in the way nature changes you, it's more just the feelings that you get from it. Like I was saying to you, that there's certain things that money cannot buy and I just think some things we've seen over the years, whether it be the rough seas or a beautiful iceberg or just a pilot whale surfacing and looking you in the eyes, they're feelings that you can't put no price on. They just bring out a sense in you that, I guess it kind of makes you know your place in it all. I think that's the most important thing, that we are - we just go through the world, taking everything, pillaging everything from this earth possible, and there's no giving back whatsoever. I just think that some of the feelings that you get from seeing the iceberg, I can't put a price on that and you can't explain it to people. It's something that's so small.

John It's very hard to articulate.

Ethan It's very hard, yeah. This is why I guess I'm struggling now. It's very hard to put into words. The same when they asked us, when they were filming us, asking us about the *Brigitte Bardot* accident and how it felt and there's no

words. It's a sailor's worst nightmare to be breached at sea and it's one of them things that when you read accounts you come across the same words because, again, it's very hard to articulate. You're in a situation where nature's dominating you. It's completely out of your control. You have to ride it out. You're either lucky or you're not. We fortunately were lucky. Ten-metre swells died down to nothing within a couple of hours. If that hadn't have happened, would it be a different story? I'm pretty sure it would have been and it makes you - especially when you've come, I guess, on the verge of near-death experiences, that dramatises it. But I guess in the bigger sense that's what it was, that you know your place in nature straight after, but we are completely inferior to it all. I guess it comes back to if we don't change, it's not going to change for us and it will give us the boot.

Present, also, in this story (and detectable in the other exemplars), is the moral nature of the lesson that is told by the narrator. Many of the stories told by activists, included in this and other themes, have a moral lesson. There is a wild agency expressed in Ella's and Ethan's account of the nature they are describing, one that is apparently dominating and indifferent to the humans' fate. It is an experience that reconfigures their conceptualization of nature and their relative control.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has presented exemplar stories that I have labelled the 'transcendent power of nature'. Nature is experienced and perceived as extraordinarily powerful and complex, within which the participant realises they are relatively insignificant and lack complete control. Participants seemed to be affected by them to various degrees and for various reasons. Sometimes the experience is intoxicating, and the participant is immersed within a sensually and cognitively overwhelming moment. Narratives were presented that had a broad emotional range: both joyful and terrifying stories are reported here. The experiences clearly have a capacity to transform self-identity and the person's conceptualisation of nature and their understanding of their life-world.

The meaning making, as it is represented through these stories, is experientially derived, rather than derived through abstraction. The experiential requirement of the phenomenon of the transcendent power of nature is problematic in the sense that it is difficult to understand without having experienced it oneself. This contributes to the cultural identity and practices of environmentalists, and is also why people who have not experienced nature in this way may struggle to comprehend environmentalists' perspectives and commitment.

That the participants told stories about the powerful and transcendent qualities of nature was not, of itself, particularly surprising. It is the foundation upon which much nature writing is built and is a well documented aspect of nature experience. Nature's capacity to invoke feelings of beauty, awe and horror has been explored by Western societies since the Enlightenment, as people's conceptualisation of wild nature as a hellish place was transformed to become a source of sublime experience (for example, Macfarlane 2003). Relph (1976: 123) describes such transformative events as peak experiences that "can lead to a change in self-awareness or constitute a touchstone by which we can judge all our other experiences of landscapes." The conservation movement is, of course, a consequence of such experiences, and the stories given by the research participants make clear, through their retelling, the connection between the experience of nature, the person they are and their activism.

The description of narrative self-identity that was developed in the conceptual framework (Chapter 3) is evident in these stories. Participants told stories about experiences of nature that, in their teleological plot structures, relate cause (nature) and effect (identity). But as I reflect upon the treatment that was developed in that chapter and compare it with the participants' stories, I am forced to consider whether I neglected the importance of emotionality in identity change. Returning to Ricoeur

(1992: 132) I am reminded of the primacy that phenomenology gives to embodied experience. It seems that the emotional impact of experiences of nature influences strongly the cognitive analysis, or rationalisation, of experience. The stories suggest that it is the emotional potency of the experiences described in this chapter that is the catalyst for identity change.

Identity change and evolving worldview seem to be in a kind of collaboration. Experiences such as the ones described here lead to changes in conceptualisation of nature and place in nature (self-identity). Mapping these stories along an anthropocentric-biocentric continuum, one can trace a movement in a biocentric direction. This seems to arise from a sense of place in nature that is relational, interconnected and which has fresh ethical dimensions.

Finally, the participants' stories suggest that that the experience of the transcendent power of nature is meaningful in part because of the modern, urban human's separation from nature; in other words, it is the contrast between the urban environment and the forests or oceans, where the impact of humans is less evident, that provides the basis for the participant's explanations of their experiences. Although transcript excerpts are not included in this chapter, several participants also told me they needed to return regularly to the forests, to regain, or be reminded of, their sense of wonder. Having recognised their separation, they need to overcome it, to reconnect, because, while nature is present in the city environment, the dominant fabric of the urban environment is constructed and controlled by humans; connection is regained by visiting wild(er) nature.

Chapter 10 Connection

INTRODUCTION

Every participant tell stories about feeling connected to the nature they were defending and/or nature generally. The experience of connection has emotional and cognitive dimensions; participants feel and know when they are experiencing connection to nature. Participants generally find it difficult to describe and communicate the experience of connectedness. Sometimes the sensation is likened to the perception of 'energy'. They tell me it is harder still to describe it to someone who has not had the experience; because in the telling it seems irrational. Connectedness is not binary, or on and off. The experience of connectedness is complex and multilayered. It can deepen with experience of, or exposure to, nature. It can also deepen with practice, which is the effort to gain greater understanding of and attention to nature. A key element of the experience of connection is the sensation of interconnectedness; nature is experienced as connecting with the research participant.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH NATURE

A central element of connection, which is implicit in its name, is the experience of relationship with nature. This seems to stem from interaction and deepening sensitivity and familiarity with nature over time. Some participants spoke about interaction with single entities such as trees, birds or cetaceans. For example, Isabella is a wildlife scientist, with particular expertise in herpetology. Her research has broadened, since completing her honours degree, to include sharks and other marine life. Her description of forming a relationship with a lizard, extends my earlier reflection upon the temporal element of developing sensitivity to nature. Isabella was asked to tell a story about an experience communicating with an animal:

Isabella I worked as a zoo keeper at the Adelaide Zoo and we had some banded Fijian Iguanas and for some reason the female every morning as soon as she saw me come in would come down, she would wait by the glass window, and as I would walk through the cage she would follow me the whole way round. And she never did it to anyone else except me.

John Is that right?

Isabella Yeah. And like we never knew why she picked me, but she would sit waiting the two hours while I cleaned every other cage, for me to come. So she'd sit by the window with her head looking out waiting for me and then just follow me around almost like a dog.

John Isn't that interesting?

Isabella Yeah. So that's probably one of the biggest interactions that I've had that really stick in my mind.

John And did that change the way you conceptualised non-humans or related to nature?

Isabella Not necessarily changed the way but it's just like, this is really cool. So you know I am, so being a herpetologist and especially working with reptiles you need to understand a bit more about their behaviour, and what they're trying to communicate with you. Normally my passion's venomous snakes, so of course you want to know when they're getting really annoyed, that they're going to give you a pretty nasty bite. And in the 11 years that I was working with them I never got bitten once. So I'd like to think a lot of that's got to do with being able to read their behaviour and so that to me is an interaction just there.

John Indeed, so it's really just developing a sensitivity to what they're doing and expressing?

Isabella Yep, and that's the thing. Like all the time animals are trying to communicate with humans, but a lot of the times we don't listen and we don't understand how they are trying to communicate with us.

Isabella also told stories about swimming with nine whales off the Queensland coast and diving with sharks while working in South Africa. She was describing the feelings of awe and calmness that she experiences in such situations.

John So what is incredible about it?

Isabella I don't know. It's just, you know it's just something that's absolutely, not necessarily insane experience, but it's just something you can't really describe.

John So it's deeply felt is it?

Isabella Oh yeah without a doubt.

John This is one of the things, like there's obviously this sort of cognitive stuff happening but it's a felt experience?

Isabella Yeah, it's just (pause) I don't know, it's like a whole body experience is all I can say. That's why I say there's just this awe, this calmness and sometimes you feel very removed from reality or time. You know just because you are watching it and it's just like oh my God this is something that you would normally be seeing on a screen at home, on the TV or something, and you're actually experiencing it. It's like time almost does stand still giving you this incredible glimpse at creatures that normally you only see on TV.

Through such experiences of connecting with non-human, "you realise that they're a living, breathing creature just like yourself." This recognition of and identification with marine animals led directly to Isabella applying to join the Sea Shepherd campaigns.

It is not suggested that such experiences are unique to the research participants. But, Isabella's narratives and the other narratives told previously about the whaling activist's journeys into activism, indicate the significance of relationship with non-human animals in the decisions they make to become and remain radical environmentalists.

The participants told stories about connection with non-animals. Sophie's account of communicating with a tree has already been discussed. Mia, Charlotte, Emily and Sam, were other participants with tree-sitting experience, who also told stories about their connection to the tree they sat in. Mia spoke earlier about her realisation that animals and plants were non-human people. I asked her:

John Are there particular individuals in that community that you've got to know or develop relationships with?

Mia I guess the trees ... So I have been up in sits and there's certainly a real kind of feeling of it's you and the tree at that point and there's really not a lot, there's no other humans. There's other trees around, but it's really a very intimate relationship between you and the tree because it's, the tree is so solid. For me, I mean for experienced activists who can get up there really quick, but certainly for me it's certainly a very confronting thing to do, to climb up 40 or 50 metres off the ground. Which can be pretty scary because your weight is on this rope and you want to know you are doing the right thing. And sometimes it's really exhausting, like half way up a lot of the time I feel like, "Oh my God, I'm so tired I can't go any further." So you kind of just put your feet on the tree and feel like "it's you and me." So you feel certainly. (pause) It's hard to explain, but there is something very comforting about the steadiness of the tree and um and that you are kind of in it together in a sense.

Emily was reluctant to form a relationship with a tree up which she had recently begun an extended sit. This was because her previous tree-sit had been felled when the Florentine blockade was broken by the police and she had experienced terrible grief at the loss of that relationship and guilt over her role in that tree being felled. (Emily explained that trees with sits are usually felled whether or not they are in the coupe that is to be logged, because the foresters know how attached to them the sitters become.) Emily was also concerned that the tree did not want her there. In the following account she tries to rationalise how one can connect with a tree. She was grieving the death of a friend and speaking about the forest's capacity for healing.

John How does it do that, do you think? Or what is it doing?

Emily Well, I don't know, because sometimes I feel like a sense of not wanting to project my human sense of reality onto the forest, not want to imagine this tree loves me, or the forest is so happy for me to be there. But in a way, if you were that - but it's tricky, because I don't want to think, oh, I'm so important that this forest is going, ooh, we love her. But I think I feel like (pause) I think

that it's tricky because I don't really (pause) there are all these things I don't really know. And I don't know if the forest has a sense of me being here and if it has a sense of all the different animals and the harmony that's going on. And if it knows when someone's here that loves it, compared to someone here that doesn't and wants to chop it down.

But I have felt over my time tree-sitting a strong connection to trees in the sense that I feel like they connect to me as well. I don't know. It's hard to explain without sounding hippyish. To me, it's something you probably don't talk about, because you don't want to. Because you can't say those things generally in the campaign world, because you get dismissed then as being not very rational. Probably before I got into forest activism, if somebody had said that, I probably would have felt a little bit like, what are you talking about?

John This is why I'm asking these questions, because I think they're real experiences, but some people have told me that words, we don't have words, so we try and use human concepts to explain something that in a sense is non-human. So, it feels like projection or it's inadequate.

Emily Yeah, it does feel hard to explain, but I do feel like (pause) I mean, especially one tree in the Floz that I spent most of my time in, which I guess really felt like, every night when I went to climb it, I don't know, am I just imagining it? I don't know. But I feel like it knows that I'm there and I feel like I'm (pause) I think that's one of the hard experiences for me, because I felt like I was (pause) we were a team. I was looking after it and it was looking after me and I'm trusting my life in it too. ... I'm just going to trust fate, or whatever, that everything's going to be okay, because the tree knows that I'm here. Yeah, that's another thing I wouldn't (pause) like journalists, "the tree knows I'm here and it's going to look after me". Sometimes in a way I think that, but then I also say to people when we're discussing these kind of things that I don't know if the tree would look after me more than any [thing else]. I don't want to think that I'm more important than the spider that also lives in this tree. We're all just living here and sometimes trees are going to fall and animals are going to get squashed and maybe that will happen to me. Right? It's all just a part of the cycle. I'm not more important than anything else.

But I do, on the other hand, I like to believe the tree's looking after me. I don't know - that was a long way of saying it, but the thing that I liked was hanging out with that tree in the Floz I would feel that. We're in a team, because I'm

looking after it and it's looking after me. That's why it was really hard when I felt that I let my side down, because I couldn't save it.

Emily described how she developed a relationship with her current tree. She started by explaining the difficulties of communicating with a non-human.

John One of the things you talked about (pause). One of the things about going into connection is not really having a language or vocabulary. Could you tell me a bit more about that?

Emily Yeah. Well, I think ... when you're having a conversation with a person, or when you're connecting with a person, you can understand where they're coming from, because you have a similar language. Even without the language, you've got body language. You can read their emotions. You can read them in a way. It's hard to necessarily read trees or know what a tree's feeling, or if it even feels. You just have to make it up or imagine it. I think it was saying before, like when we were talking a bit about indigenous culture, I think that a lot has been lost of that knowledge, but I think there are a lot of cultures in the world, including indigenous culture here, where they do actually know the language. They do know how to read the landscape, how to read that sense, and they know when they're supposed to be somewhere, or they're not supposed to be somewhere. They can a sense of how it feels.

But I do think, even though we don't have that language, I don't think it's impossible to get that connection or get that understanding. I think it's about just listening; not just listening, but allowing this, opening it up and just seeing what you feel. I guess it is, it's not about words and that's why it is hard to talk about it and hard to articulate it, but it's about how you feel. You get this - it's hard to explain it, but you do, you can get a sense, you can be somewhere and you can get a sense, or you can be with this tree and you can get a sense. As we said before, it's hard to know, well, am I imagining it? Am I just wanting the tree to love me? I'm thinking, oh, the tree loves me, we've got this connection. Maybe it's not feeling that at all; maybe it has no thoughts; maybe it's just a tree, just there, with nothing, or maybe it's actually going, "Go away!"

I think that's what I was saying before, you can't come to the environment knowing and with an idea of what your connection is going to be, because I

think that's just (pause) it's not real then. You're not actually connecting with it, you're just wanting something.

I think that that's how I feel with this tree. I didn't want to come to this tree and just straight away think that we had a connection just because I'm sitting here. I wanted to open it up to the possibility that we can have a connection and to just wait and see how the tree felt like, if the tree feels, kind of thing.

John You were concerned that perhaps it didn't want you here.

Emily Yeah, well, I mean, that's right. I felt like there could be a possibility it didn't want me here and really it was living a nice, peaceful life and I've come up here, put all these ropes on it. I'm like, yeah, I am here or whatever, and I feel like I have to remind it that I'm here to look after it. Yeah, and I guess at the beginning I was worried to even open up that possibility to really feel that sense, because I didn't want the tree to be (pause) I didn't want us to have a realisation that the tree didn't want me to be here. I was worried that that might be the case, because then it would be weird. I'd be connected to this tree but it didn't want me here and I couldn't get down, because I said I wouldn't.

So, I guess maybe that's why I wasn't. Maybe that stopped me a little bit from connecting with the tree in the beginning. But then I feel like, and maybe it's a shift in me, or maybe it's just how the relationship has developed, but I feel like there were points in time when I started to feel a presence of a connection, if that makes sense.

I think in our [voice recorder] charging break I was talking maybe a bit about that, about how at the beginning I'd felt lonely and I'd anticipated that that loneliness needed to be filled by having other people up here. Then I had this shift in that sense where I felt like actually I had this (pause) I was enjoying this connection with the tree and I wasn't lonely, that the tree was my company, like I was (pause)

John You said you woke up in the night.

Emily Yeah, I had this. It's weird where you can have a shift in your perception and you can locate it to one point. That's how I feel, but it's like I can't really articulate or understand the rest of it, but I just know I woke up in the night and I didn't feel like, "I wish I had someone, like a person, here to keep me company". I woke up and I was like (pause) I turned around in the darkness to

check that my tree was there. Well, I hope it is, because I don't know where I'd be! But, turn around, there's my tree and we're here together.

I think I was saying too, it's like it changes how I feel about being up here, because it means that being up here is a celebration of enjoying this moment with the tree, in the same way that you might really enjoy or appreciate time with someone important in your life, hanging out with them. You just appreciate that time for what it is.

Emily is unable to explain rationally her feelings of connection and communication with trees in the Florentine. It is a felt experience which can be achieved through an attitude of respect, openness and sensitivity. She also acknowledges in herself paradoxical impulses such as her desire to be humble about her likely importance to a tree, but also wanting to be recognised by it as a friend. These impulses reflect what is essential about connection to another individual: a desire to be recognised and acknowledged by the other. In this case the 'individual' is non-human and the evidence of recognition more difficult to establish.

Emily, as is the case with several other participants, thinks that the ability to connect with nature, or at least read the signals that nature projects, is something that is intrinsic to humans but lost to modern cultures. Indigenous cultures are referred to as examples of people who remain able to use these intrinsic abilities, because they live in proximity to, and are interdependent with nature. The key, the participants argue, is to spend time in nature and learn the skills necessary to connect properly. We will revisit this issue in the next chapter about communication with nature.

For Charlotte establishing a sense of connection with a tree in which she was sitting was pivotal to her activism. She told the following bittersweet story:

Charlotte I guess there was one time. I was half asleep just waking up and in my dream I was around a warm fire and it was really peaceful. Then I woke up and realised I'd curled around the tree trunk and snuggled in. And two days later

the tree got cut down. That was when they moved in. I think that was also a pivotal connection with it. It was a really nice experience.

Other participants told stories of interaction with the forest or ocean as a whole, rather than with an individual animal or plant. Stories of interaction often involved the participant as a passive witness (for example watching birds). Sometimes nature was experienced in a more passive mood, for example as if it accepted a participant's presence. Most stories, however, described events in which the nature was perceived as an active actor in the interaction and creation of meaning by the participant.

There is a temporal aspect to connection. Several participants reported that their sense of connection strengthened with greater familiarity borne from spending time in nature. Spending time allows participants to learn more about the environment. This involves developing various sensory skills, becoming aware of ecological relationships, learning the place's natural history. Will described learning to see and understand the forest as a process of self-transformation. In this passage he recalls a campaign in the forests of southern New South Wales early on in his activist career.

Will I've still got these incredible memories, of seeing greater gliders. They were like giant possums that leapt from tree to tree with quiet agility and grace that seemed beyond their shape and then the little sugar gliders which seemed to be the more graceful sort of version and I think they, in particular, really connected me with the forest because it wasn't just the trees, it was these amazing creatures and I wouldn't have known they were there without the spotlight. They are hard to see and so I needed someone to point them out and to explain their life cycle and so I started to really understand how the forest eco system works and the same with these guys describing the birds and the relationship like in the south coast forest, you've got spotted gum for example and it's got a symbiotic relationship with a cycad palm, often found together and they sort of feed off each other and so having those things, it was like wow, I've been in nature so many times before where I hadn't really been given that, it's the education in the conservation sense in terms of these things

will be destroyed and you are standing in a place saying, this forest will be flattened if something is not done and that's quite powerful.

Will explains later in the interview how his sense of connection can deepen with practice. He tells me he understands humans as biologically evolved to relate deeply to nature (similar to the biophilia thesis) and that Western society's current estrangement is a relatively brief interruption in the millennia of humanity's close engagement with nature:

Will It is. It's ingrained in our DNA and it's only this; I mean again Gary Snyder says about when he was criticised for taking up this new idea of environmentalism and he said no, what current society is, is just a small eddy. He said what I'm following is beyond that eddy and that eddy will go and I guess it's tapping back in. People like Dave Foreman, Starhawk, Thorn Coyle and John Seed are trying to do, I mean John Seed talks about it the native people had rituals, they did every day, they were embedded in nature, they worked it, they reinforced it and they honoured the land, they honoured the water and the elements that provided them life and as a human society we've lost that connection and so John talks about how much more important it is for us as members of an industrial society seemingly removed from nature to develop those rituals. To re-remember and re-connect.

John So you have basically practised in your life?

Will Yes I've taken it, again it's a handful of figures in my life that have been very influential and John is one of them. That everything is developing a practise every day and so this morning I got up early and went for a walk up the forested hill behind my place, early just before dawn and do a few breathing exercises and give thanks for my life and to recognise the land and the role I've been given and the role I play in that land and that practise has been very helpful for sustaining my activism. It allows me that connection and it's something I carry with me throughout the day.

John So Will, could you give me some examples of what this kind of deepening connection is? Some people might have a sense of what connection with nature is but what is it for you, certainly now in this kind of deeper practise, how do you know when you are connected if that's the right way to express it?

Will I think the flipside is more when you are not connected. When you lack energy when you burnout and you're exhausted because if you look at the animals, if you look at wallabies or pademelons, they're not depressed or they're not sitting on a lounge contemplating when the next food is coming in, they're full of life, they're striving, their thriving, the same with the trees. The trees are growing and they're making the most out of whatever is there. The water, the air, the ground and so when you are not connected you lose that energy and you're losing part of yourself, part of humanity and so being connected to nature means being aware. Aware that's whether the Buddhist call it the mindfulness, being here, but also having that drive and that passion for life which is what we all should have. This is what all the animals have, this is what all the plants have.

John That's fantastic. One of the themes that seems to be coming out of my interviews or how I'm interpreting it anyway is that for the activists I've interviewed, this whole thing is about just being an authentic human being.

Will It's interesting because deep ecology often gets accused of being anti human. ... When in fact it's more human than the humanists, really because it's what it means to be really human. Not this fake version of a human that gets promoted on commercial TV. It's about being that person, like indigenous people, we're connected to the landscape for hundreds of thousands of years.

This is not only a process of knowledge acquisition. It also operates in an affective domain because participants learn how to 'feel' nature. Will invokes indigenous traditions and Western figures to theorise about why and how humans have an innate ability to establish meaningful relationships. He has joined a tradition of indigenous and Western figures for whom their relationship with nature is a defining element of their identity. This tradition engages in practices that, he finds, deepen his sense of being part of nature. Such practices reinforce his relationship and give him the emotional resilience to avoid burning out as an activist.

The phenomenon of connection also appears to be experienced as nature opening up to the participants. Many of the forest participants had spent several months to several years living almost permanently in the forests.

Charlotte described the process of increasing connection as becoming “spiritually entwined in the forest”. This is not a phenomenon that is unique to activists of course. Much nature writing describes the effect upon the self of time spent in nature. Writing about his solo travels in the Tasmanian wilderness Hawes (2007: xxiv) describes the intimacy he develops with the landscape through which he passes and in which he rarely feels lacking in company, for he is left with “the afterglow of the journey’s innumerable subtle ecstasies, and the sense that the land has inscribed itself in the very core of my being.”

An aspect of the phenomenon of connection, which distinguishes it from these two concepts, is that the participant feels that they have a two way relationship; the other is doing something back. In the experience of connection the participants’ conceptualisation of nature changes. It is no longer a passive object because it has become subject, or peopled by non-human subjects. The phenomenon of feeling connection with nature radically alters their gaze. It permits different ways of understanding nature, self and the relationship between the two.

Connection is interactional. It feels two way. The person may experience a sense of being welcomed or allowed into the place in a more meaningful way. It may feel like greater awareness of nature, in terms of its beauty, its complexity, or its energy. Sometimes the feeling is profound and has transcendental qualities. One may feel in touch with something greater and more powerful than the self. As a result, the person’s sense of nature may shift to recognise nature as sentient, independent and filled with non-human people or subjects.

Tuan, calls the affective bond that people develop with places ‘topophilia’ (1974). He describes this as an achievement of landscape, culture and individual perception. Topophilic sentiment, particularly when it is experienced strongly, Tuan claims (1974: 93), is an indication that the place

evoking such feelings has become a symbol. He uses the example of the ways in which cultural attitudes towards mountains have changed in different cultures over time, from, for example, places to be feared to sources of sublime experience (see also Macfarlane 2003). The research participants' attitudes towards the forests, oceans and whales they are contesting similarly arise within historical socio-cultural settings. However, while the cultural frame may be what one carries when one enters places, the individual's experience of that place can give rise to altered understandings of places. It is in such a way that the participants, among their groups, develop their own distinct cultures.

It is evident that there are different levels of connection and perception of the environments the participants are living in. Relph distinguishes between attending to a place's character superficially, perhaps because one's attention is consumed by other concerns, and an attentive engagement that seeks to "grasp places for what they are to those who dwell in them and for what they mean" (1976: 142). It is, I think the participants' stories suggest, through such attentive engagement that the experience of connection arises and, as a consequence, the "field of care" to which Relph (1976: 142) also refers. This latter engagement is achieved, the stories suggest, through the spending of time, developing attentive and perceptual skills, and adopting a particular attitude, one shared, perhaps, with colleagues.

Connection is somewhat different to the geographical concept of place attachment, although the participants undoubtedly become attached to the places they defend. Place attachment describes a person's emotional stance towards a place or setting. Connection, perhaps, is one of the experiences that contributes to place attachment. Similarly, connection is not appreciation, which describes an aesthetic response to nature, although of course participants develop a deep appreciation of nature as the participants' stories attest.

The experience of connection that is presented in the next story illustrates the importance of attentiveness, time and spatiality in the experience of connection, which arises through attentiveness to nature.

Riley So one summer I was there for six weeks and I spent probably two weeks out, way, way out in the Black Hills. And like yourself [I had described a walk I did alone in Tasmania's Southwest] I wandered around. And I found a place and there were these huge pine trees that were probably two metres in diameter. And they went up forever. Then just a bed of pine wilts and food, sleeping bag and myself examining there for about ten days or so.

I had many encounters with the wild life, mainly the rattlesnakes, waking up one morning with one next to me, going in at night and shaking out the bag and a couple are coming out. And I never got bit and I found that it was just I wasn't afraid of them because I had respect for them, but it was that being in tune with knowing that I was going to be okay. But being under that tree like you said over those nights and days and listening to it go through it's cycles and how it sounded and how it reacted. It made me feel insignificant, but I felt fully connected to that situation and didn't want to go back, but had to.

This story emphasises the skilled nature of connection. Achieving it is a process that deepens over time and with effort, to such an extent that it can be spellbinding, an enchantment. The tree is an anchoring element of the experience, emphasising the importance of the spatial in configuring both the experience and the telling.

How do the participants know when they are experiencing connection? Ethan, a whaling activist, had been talking about connection, so I asked him to tell me a story about how he knew when he was connecting.

Ethan Another story to maybe connect these together was when we actually did the Faroes campaign, the pilot whale campaign in the Faroe Islands. So, Operation Ferocious Isles, the second campaign Sea Shepherd did, and we actually took the small boats out. I was with Steve Irwin at the time and we launched the small boats and we went out and basically we were just surrounded by over 100 pilot whales in a small boat. There were calves, mums,

dads, and just one of them surfaced quite a few times a metre away from the boat, literally an arm's distance, and you just looked him in the eye. Paul Watson [Sea Shepherd Conservation Society founder and leader] always tells this story that he retells and retells. Now any speech he gives he'll reuse the story. Even for years I was wondering, why does he keep using the story? Why does he keep using it? It was only being there at that time and having that experience myself of that connection that you really feel something. It's like looking at someone who's being (pause) another human being in the eye and you can feel their pain and emotion, whether they're in prison, or whether they're being tortured, or a kid is being bullied. You can always sense that and to me there's no difference between that human element and that animal element.

John So, it's really communicating?

Ethan Exactly, yeah. Anyone who says we can't communicate beyond words has got to look a little bit further.

Ethan's story suggests that the experience of connection occurs at cognitive and affective levels and that it involves the experience of being acknowledged by the other. Ethan's telling also suggests that the experience can give rise to a reconfiguration of the human-animal boundary. This reconfiguration represents a shift from the traditional humanist idea of humans as completely separate from animals, to one in which the boundary is permeable, or a matter of degree, and which recognises that animals can possess human faculties or capacities.

Interestingly, some whaling participants commented that achieving connection during the campaign is difficult because their vessel separates them from the ocean and in particular the whales. Oliver told a story about travelling in the Southern Ocean with a pod of whales. His separation from them limited his ability to form an experiential connection:

Oliver Most of the interaction I have had with whales have been on board down in the Antarctic and um I would really like to get into the water with them, but as yet it hasn't happened. It very hard to have an interaction with whales on a

boat I think because they are in their medium and you are totally out of it and you are on this man made construction as well.

It is perhaps not surprising that it was with birds that Oliver and his colleagues were able to develop the strongest sense of connection to nature, because they could visit his ship bound environment. We had been talking about the experience of nature communicating and I asked him:

John How does nature speak to you?

Oliver I think that there is a language there that we are yet to really discover. I think that is a frontier for us that we don't even realise. It's something that Paul [Watson] says often in his speeches. You know we spend billions of dollars searching for life in outer space. For intelligent life in outer space when we have intelligent life out here on this planet and we ignore it. Look at the way we treat it. We murder it, we dismember it, we cut it into small pieces to figure out what makes it tick. We don't even try to talk to it, we don't even try to communicate with it. If only we can cross that hurdle that these animals. We can have this connection. You know we have this connections, you know the child can have this connection with birds, with wild creatures. If we can only stop and learn their language, observe them in their natural habitat. Try and make a connection with them.

I asked Oliver for a story about connection with nature. He began with an account of interactions with birds and then developed a marvelous story that suggested whales understood that the Sea Shepherd would not harm them:

Oliver Probably it would be with the seabirds. I mean they often follow us in the Southern Ocean. The wandering albatross, the Antarctic petrels, cape petrels, the skuas. Well the skua is kind of ugly (both laugh). The wandering albatross, the sooty albatross and the Antarctic petrel are my favourites. They would all like follow the slipstream of the ship like an eddy current in the river where a stationary rock and the water moving past it forms a current going in the opposite direction. The birds will ride that slipstream there and come up the side of the vessel. You can literally almost reach out and touch their wingtips, with them looking straight at you. They are coming out and checking out

everything out on board. They are literally checking you out and flying right there (points). And they will peel off and they will ride the waves and then they will carry round on the slipstream and keep coming past and doing laps like that.

The Antarctic petrels will ride the bow wave and then leave. They are checking you out. You can see they are checking you out and you are sort of checking you out and you can see there is that sort of connection there.

John How does that feel?

Oliver It feels fantastic. It feels fantastic, I mean it's hard because you are stuck on the ship. But at least they are coming to visit you. It's really funny to see them. You get snow petrels as well. They are beautiful. They just shed off an iceberg. They are pure white and do the same thing, come past the boat. Sometime you've got food scraps. When we tip the food scraps over the side and they all come to investigate. And you can see how disappointed they are that there's vegetables, no fish, just vegetables. So you have some roughage and they are obviously not interested because they eat krill.

The dolphins as well. Often as we are leaving and when we come back we will have dolphins come in and ride in. Sometimes they come in from every direction, all speeding into the ship to ride the bow wave. And everyone loves that. As soon as you get the call that dolphins and whales are around every one runs onto deck. And cheering and screaming and all the rest of it. These dolphins are awesome. They will stay there for half an hour, an hour riding the bow wave and having a fantastic time. And showing off as well (John really?). Because they can see us.

John They are showing off to you because they can see you?

Oliver Yes, and they are having an awesome time, because they are like, surfing. Um, so that's pretty fun to watch. The whales are a bit more (pause) they will come to the ship. And that's the funny thing, because there have been moments like when you think "is this real?" Because there are moments when they must know what we are doing. Because we have had moments when we have been chasing the Nisshin Maru [a Japanese whaler]. And on one day there, whales came out from everywhere and different species. We had pilot whales, we had humpbacks, we had one of the smaller cetaceans, I can't remember, yeah minke. They all came out. It was the day the Nisshin Maru stopped, really calm water. They stopped, we stopped. We had the harpoon boats with us and

then all of a sudden all these whales came out between us and the Nisshin Maru and in fact this campaign it happened again. We were intervening against this harpoon boat. We were basically stopping it. We were chasing it, we were harassing it. We were stopping it. And of all the Southern Ocean. I was in front in the small inflatable. Just as we were crossing across the bow of the harpoon boat, blocking its path. And a minke whale came out of the water, right in front of us. And like, whoa, it came out right in front of us. And I pointed to the whale and pointed out to the harpooner, who was standing by the harpoon and it was like, “that’s one you are not going to get you bastards!”.

They always seem to turn up in the moment. That’s what happened when I was on the harpoon ship. We were looking out the porthole and this big whale surfaced right next to the harpoon ship and was like going along with it and it was like, we were like, “get away, get away” (laughs). And it was like, amazing, and it actually surfaced and it was going along the harpoon boat, and it turned and its tail flew up and it was like it was saying goodbye to us, waving and off it went. And that has happened on quite a few occasions.

John So it’s like they sense they are safer around you?

Oliver Yeah, even going down this year we were stopped with the Gojira, the Steve Irwin, the Bob Barker and the harpoon boats were trailing us. We were on their, sort of, circling around us and we had stopped in one area. And then all these humpbacks came out breaching and stuff. It might be coincidence, but those things happening. Wow, it’s like (pause).

John Yeah. So what do you do with that? How does it affect you?

Oliver It gives you a pretty good drive to continue to protect these animals. It’s like they almost know they are safe around us. You can read into it that way. Some would say that’s ridiculous and maybe it is, but when you are there and that’s what you are defending and it comes out and hangs out with you that’s pretty special.

Once again this story (really two stories), which exemplifies similar stories told by other whaling participants, emphasises the relational aspects of meaning making about experiences of non-humans. By relational I mean that meaning making seems to have inter-subjective qualities: it is in the

relational dynamics between humans and animals that the story is centered and from which the story's lesson emerges.

Oliver's experience of connection with these animals is an interpretive achievement that arises from, and gives rise to, a sense of *interconnection*. There is a circularity of meaning making here between experience of nature, interpretation, return to experience and reinterpretation. Oliver acknowledges that there is little evidence that the whales recognise the Sea Shepherd as whale protectors rather than whale hunters. But this does not matter because the motivation he ascribes to the whales' behaviour feels good, confirms his choices and strengthens his identity as an activist, in turn strengthening his connection to nature.

Finally, this story is also a story about giving human qualities to non-human animals. Having recognised consciousness and intentionality in the gulls or the whales, it is difficult not to use human language and symbols to describe their behaviour in non-anthropomorphic ways. Having used human action as at least a metaphor to understand the whales' behaviour, it is perhaps an easy step to frame animal motivations in similar terms. Further, it is as if by ascribing a human form of agency to whales, particularly the one that waves its tail, Oliver has made a symbolic transaction that cements his connection to whales.

CONCLUSION

The experience of connection is described by the research participants as akin to a relationship with another being. While this is easiest to understand at the human to animal level, participants reported experiences of connections to trees and landscapes. A central quality of the experience is its interactional nature; the other is experienced as responding, in some way, to the participant. Connection has cognitive and affective dimensions, and it has the capacity to alter the participants' understanding of, and the

way they conceptualise, the element of nature with which they are interacting.

There is not a single state of 'connection' because it is not a fixed phenomenon, it is nuanced and has depth. Those moments during which connectedness is realized, while unmistakable, can be difficult to describe in a rational way. The research participants report that with time and skilled attentiveness, their sense of connection can change or deepen. It is in this sense that socio-cultural understandings of nature begin to shift, influenced also by more experienced activist colleagues, and thus an aspect of the activist culture develops.

The activist cultures, to which the participants belong, explain the ability to connect with nature as something that is innate, albeit a skill set that is difficult to exercise. Indigenous peoples are recognised as ideal expressions of this ability and the custodians of expert knowledge about how to develop such ways of experiencing nature. Connection must be practiced. Maintaining a sense of connection, Seed argues, must be achieved through regular experiential processes and joining in community with other people who are also seeking to maintain an ecological consciousness. He writes that "the *ideas* of interconnectedness and participation may remain, but in the absence of *experience* they are sterile" (Seed 2006: 100-1).

The experience of connection, as it is described by the participants, has a reciprocal quality and suggests that forms of communication between the participants and nature. The participants told many stories that were described as communication and they form the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 11 Communication

INTRODUCTION

Related to the theme 'connection' is the experience of 'communication'. Many stories have been presented already that are also stories about communicating with nature. The next few stories will examine this experience further.

It is no surprise perhaps, especially given this inquiry's phenomenological methodology, that the participants' stories emphasise the relational aspects of their experiences and conceptualisations of nature: consciousness reaches out to something in the life world, which may in turn be experienced as reaching back. Meaning making by the participants, especially as it is told in their stories, appears to reflect this relational experience. Indeed, if one thinks about what is a relationship (whether it be with another human, an animal or an institution), communication is an essential and everyday element of maintaining it. Matilda, a participant who makes an effort throughout the interview to portray herself as an objective and professional activist, rather than an 'hippy', acknowledges that her sense of relationship with nature can be expressed through acknowledgement and communication. Discussing the Florentine she told me:

Matilda I certainly have very strong connections with that landscape. I mean, I don't think any of us who do this stuff seriously. I mean, you don't see me hugging trees, that's for sure, but when I walk through the forest it's just like your mates you wander through and when they're gone, it is quite phenomenally difficult.

John Certainly a lot of the people I've spoken to talk about the kind of grief they experience at losing them.

- Matilda Well, it's like someone's ripped your heart out of your chest. But yeah, certainly you have very strong connections with particular trees or particular places within the forest that you know. You have your favourite bits.
- John Some people who I've interviewed, when they talk about the kind of connections that they develop with particular places or things, whether it's rocks or trees, they tend to speak (pause). Often it seems to me they speak in kinship terms. They really are developing bonds with them as if they're people.
- Matilda Yeah, I think it's true. I mean, I don't know, we don't really talk about it much. But I know that when I've been away from the forest for a while and I walk back to a bit of bush, it's just like, well, you're not quite saying, "g'day, mate." But if you watch people who have been around, they're continually just sort of patting the forest, like "how have you been?" Certainly going out when forests have been destroyed and just saying sorry to them, that our species have inflicted this. But yeah, I suppose it's not something that's talked about. We'll speak about it in the vernacular of, "it's an amazing bit of bush and ra-ra-ra," in the Tassie direct action slang. But it's very unusual if not absolutely very, very rare to have, I guess, profound or intricate discussions about the way that we feel about the forest.

Communication may also be experienced as if it is emanating from the object of the person's attention, whether it is at the level of landscape or individuals. For example, Lucas, described an experience when he wandered into an area of forest where he developed a feeling that he should not be there:

- Lucas I guess walking into an area where you get an overwhelming sense that it's wrong, everything's wrong and I can't explain how that sense hits you but when it does your thoughts turn to it. When your thoughts turn to it everything starts, the warning bells start ringing in. Everyone's going something's wrong, you've got to get out of here. It's fairly intuitive and I, just at times it's been like a sense of panic and so it's something that's crept on you and you've gone, "shit there's something wrong about this," and it's just like everything's strange, "get out, get out." Then it's just like, I better get out and running out of areas of forest that are just so wrong for me to be there, feels so wrong for me to be there. So I don't know what would happen if I was to stay,

if I was trying to (pause). It's not really an option to stay and try and experience what would happen.

Human to human communication is experienced as an exchange; it involves acknowledgment and transaction. It appears that the participants mirror this in their relationships with nature. Jack told me a story about an interaction with a moose and her calf that years later remained a powerful memory:

Jack We went on a canoe in Algonquin Park and we were about halfway through the trip and we were way into the interior. And it was early one morning and there was still fog on the lake and we could hear the loons and everything. It was really calm and really beautiful and we went out for a little paddle in the canoe to see if we could see some moose or any sort of wildlife. And we did end up finding a moose and it was a big mother, with her calf there. They let us come up within two metres of them, they were kind of feeding in the water. That was just really really special to be able to see that. Just being that close and watching them move and watching them eat, you can really see the intelligence and the power of those animals, definitely.

John I imagine they would've been very aware of your presence.

Jack Absolutely, yeah. She kept a, definitely a close eye on us, but I think there was... she knew we were there just to admire not to harm. So she was okay with us getting that close, especially with her calf there too.

John Which is pretty rare, actually, isn't it?

Jack It was beautiful. It's definitely something that's going to be in my mind for my whole life probably.

John Why is something like that so significant?

Jack I don't know. That's kind of a hard one to explain. Like we said earlier, some of these things are really hard to put into words. Just being able to... watch them. Just appreciate the way they can live up there. That's a tough one.

John It is. I'm sorry, it is. They're really powerful things but putting it into words can be difficult.

Jack You almost feel a connection with them. You're both just there and experiencing the wild and living in it. It's so harmonious for them and we, as humans technically what we do is we rape and pillage.

Oliver lamented the lack of effort given to learning how to communicate with other species. He echoes Isabella's statement in the previous chapter that animals are always trying to communicate with humans.

Oliver I think that there is a language there that we are yet to really discover. I think that is a frontier for us that we don't even realise. It's something that Paul [Captain Watson] says often in his speeches. You know we spend billions of dollars searching for life in outer space. For intelligent life in outer space when we have intelligent life out here on this planet and we ignore it. Look at the way we treat it. We murder it, we dismember it, we cut it into small pieces to figure out what makes it tick. We don't even try to talk to it, we don't even try to communicate with it. And if only we can cross that hurdle that these animals. We can have this connection. You know we have this connections, you know the child can have this connection with birds, with wild creatures. If we can only stop and learn their language, observe them in their natural habitat. Try and make a connection with them. We have had that in the past. If you look at the killer whales in Eden with the aboriginals there. They used to bring, they used to herd the southern rights, the humpbacks into the bay and tire them for the aboriginal hunters ...

But I think with creatures with whales and dolphins we can have that sort of relationship. They can help us as much as we can help them. We just have to start treating them with respect and learn their language.

Ethan, had a powerful experience of communication with whales during a Sea Shepherd campaign. His communication experience appears to be an empathic response to the whales, who are being hunted by whalers and he imagines their response is the same as a human's would be in a similar situation.

Ethan I was with the Steve Irwin at the time and we launched the small boats and we went out and basically we were just surrounded by over 100 pilot whales in a small boat ... It's like looking at someone who's being - another human being

in the eye and you can feel their pain and emotion. You can always sense that and to me there's no difference between that human element and that animal element.

John So, it's really communicating.

Ethan Exactly, yeah. Anyone who says we can't communicate beyond words has got to look a little bit further. It's that, just judging their feelings and emotions.

Ethan's story highlights the nature of the experience of communication with the non-human and the difficulty of explaining it. Nature-human communication is largely non-verbal. Nicholson writes (2002: 19) "Our relations to the natural world is in some important way nonverbal and unspoken. We may speak to other human beings or to ourselves about our encounter with the natural world, but the encounter itself does not transpire in the medium of human language." Making sense of it to oneself is difficult enough, but how does one describe and interpret it to another who has not had a similar experience?

Several stories about communication with trees were told by participants. Emily described how several colleagues reported their conclusion that a tree in the Florentine did not want to be used as a tree-sit:

Emily There was this tree at the Florentine and a few people that had been there for a while had a sense that it didn't really want to have a tree-sit in it. That's not actually the initial reason why we took the tree-sit down, but it was the reason. But I guess the thing is, when some people would ask, I would tell them a rational reason why we wouldn't have a tree-sit. That's a valid reason as well, which is that there's concerns around the fact that it was very close to where the road is and were the roots stable and that.

But there's people that know that there's something else going on there. We'd had a feeling it didn't want us there. It didn't want to have a tree-sit in it. Some people had said that they'd had bad dreams or whatever up there. I don't really know where my sense of that came from. I can't pinpoint it to something. But I guess it's like, yeah, if you open yourself up to the possibility that the landscape is saying something to you and you do just listen. I use that

word, but it's not really the right word, but you do just see what the sense, you see what the vibe is, and you can, then I guess, you can see.

So, yeah, I guess there were a few of us and I guess they were people who had been around it for a long time that had that feeling. Interestingly, it's the only tree out of our (pause) because we didn't have a tree-sit in it, it actually survived and it's the only one. All the other ones we had tree-sits in were cut down, because anything that had a tree-sit in it was cut down. So, it survived.

In three paragraphs Emily presents us with a story about a tree that is a strategically good choice for a tree-sit because it is at the entrance to the contested forest coupe. Emily develops a feeling that the tree does not want to be used as a sit. She learns that other activists have the same experience and they decide not to use it. Recognising that the reasons they are using would be judged irrational, a rational explanation is given to people who do not share the experience, or who are not trusted with the experience of communication. The decision ultimately results in the tree remaining standing after the blockade is busted and the coupe felled. Emily seems to wonder if the tree acted in the knowledge that it would die if it was used as a sit.

How can we interpret stories such as this? Emily's story highlights both the advantages and limitations of the methods that have been adopted in this inquiry. The interviews explicitly seek stories like this one, stories that activists would be unlikely to reveal in a different research context; the confidentiality and privacy of the interview environment encourages the participant to reveal things that she has said she would not normally tell other activists. However, the interviews collect stories that are constructed for me by the participant post hoc. An ethnographic study would have enabled me to observe the participant's interactions with her colleagues and the meaning making processes that occurred around the campfire perhaps during reflection or planning sessions.

Narratives about communication with nature seem fabulous, because they contradict the rational, scientific, belief that plants do not possess consciousness and cannot communicate with humans (see Marder 2013 for an alternative view that engages with plant science to reconsider plant and human relations). But Emily is not alone in this experience. As the stories that I have collected demonstrate, such experiences are not unusual.

I am reminded of indigenous Australian understandings of nature and in particular the advice given by Bill Neidjie, a traditional owner and founder of Kakadu National Park, who belonged to a sophisticated culture with a continuous heritage of approximately 60,000 years:

You can look,
but feeling ...
that make you.

Feeling make you,
Out there in open space.
He coming through your body.
Look while he blow and feel with your body ...
because tree just about your brother or father ...
and tree is watching you (1985: 51).

It is difficult to understand what Bill Neidjie means, because my culture provides neither the vocabulary nor the skills to experience nature in this way, or expert elders to inculcate one into this way of understanding the world (see Connell 2007). Jensen in his account of interspecies communication describes this as a perceptual ineptness peculiar to Westerners (Jensen 2000 cited by Taylor 2010: 91). Emily's comments seem to point in the direction that Neidjie describes. Emily's consciousness is directed towards the tree and she senses somehow that it does not want to be, or that it is unsuited to be, a tree-sit. In the middle paragraph Emily says

that sensations of communication can arise when you open yourself to nature in a particular way; only those with the skills and experience to do so have this experience. She also explains that the verb 'listen' is inadequate; it is a feeling, an experience of something that is beyond rational language. Something at physical and semantic levels is happening in the context of the relationship between her and that tree that seems to depend upon her psychological orientation and skills. Also interesting is the stance that she adopts, once she (and her colleagues) have interpreted the tree's signals. Despite the tree's perfect position in tactical terms, they adopt a respectful attitude towards the tree following what they feel are its wishes.

The scientific basis for the experience that Emily describes is not the subject of the present inquiry. What becomes the subject of interpretation is the structure of the experience and the processes by which the participant makes meaning about them. It seems that the meanings attributed to this story are mediated through discussions with fellow activists and it is in these social relations that sociological explanations of meaning making are situated most comfortably. This, of course, is what being human is: it is our urge to give meaning to things beyond the simply utilitarian. Macfarlane, in his history of the fluidity of Western cultural ideas about mountains writes, "what we call a mountain is thus in fact a collaboration of the physical forms of the world with the imagination of humans – a mountain of the mind" (2003: 19). So too, forests are a hybrid of the physical and cultural, and in the narratives presented here we gain an insight into a small group of people developing meaning out of their entanglement with their environment.

Emily, spending so much time in the forests, with a small group of the most dedicated activists is a member of a community who develop particular expert knowledge and practices about the Florentine. We are witnesses of the development of a distinct sub-culture, within the activist community.

What I find particularly interesting is the relational dimension of this process of meaning making. It strikes me that one insight that can be gained from this story is that Emily is developing a special relationship with the forest and tree that serves to delineate her identity as similar to her close colleagues, but distinct from other people (see Malpas 2008: 327). The experience of communication does not just give revelatory powers; it becomes a culturally inscribed practice that has consequences for identity and action.

These are practices that emphasise the collaboration of natural and cultural phenomena. Emily's story, and other participants' stories about communicative experiences with nature, challenge modernity's, or at least humanism's, insistence upon nature-human separation. Emily's story expresses a relational ontology bound in interaction between humans and their environment, and in particular, humans and non-human identities or people, an ontology easily recognisable in accounts of non-modern cultures (see Taylor 2010: 153-4). It is in this relational field that the concept of more-than-human agency seems manifest. I wonder how Emily's self-identity and conceptualisation of nature has changed through experiences such as these.

In the story about the tree that did not want to be used, Emily and her colleagues are responding to a 'plant person' (Harvey 2005: 104). A consequence of such a configuration is the moral obligation that they have developed towards a non-human other; their tactical decisions about how best to defend this nature from destruction have taken on a new ethical dimension.

The final transcript excerpt in this chapter, also from Emily's interview, is about the nature of communication and connection as she develops a relationship with the tree that supports her platform. She communicates the challenges and complexities of approaching, experiencing and explaining her experiences.

Emily I think when you're having a conversation with a person, or when you're connecting with a person, you can understand where they're coming from, because you have a similar language. Even without the language, you've got body language. You can read their emotions. You can read them in a way. It's hard to necessarily read trees or know what a tree's feeling, or if it even feels. You just have to make it up or imagine it. I think I was saying before, like when we were talking a bit about indigenous culture, I think that a lot has been lost of that knowledge, but I think there are a lot of cultures in the world, including indigenous culture here, where they do actually know the language. They do know how to read the landscape, how to read that sense, and they know when they're supposed to be somewhere, or they're not supposed to be somewhere. They can a sense of how it feels.

But I do think, even though we don't have that language, I don't think it's impossible to get that connection or get that understanding. I think it's about just listening; not just listening, but allowing this, opening it up and just seeing what you feel. I guess it is, it's not about words and that's why it is hard to talk about it and hard to articulate it, but it's about how you feel. You get this - it's hard to explain it, but you do, you can get a sense, you can be somewhere and you can get a sense or you can be with this tree and you can get a sense. As we said before, it's hard to know, well, am I imagining it? Am I just wanting the tree to love me? I'm thinking, "oh, the tree loves me, we've got this connection." Maybe it's not feeling that at all; maybe it has no thoughts; maybe it's just a tree, just there, with nothing, or maybe it's actually going, "Go away".

You can't come to the environment knowing and with an idea of what your connection is going to be, because I think that's just (pause) it's not real then. You're not actually connecting with it, you're just wanting something. I think that that's how I feel with this tree. I didn't want to come to this tree and just straight away think that we had a connection just because I'm sitting here. I wanted to open it up to the possibility that we can have a connection and to just wait and see how the tree felt like, if the tree feels, kind of thing.

The experiences of the participants, as they are understood and explained, in this case by Emily, seem to create for the participants a world that is animate, unfolding and bound in relationships (see Ingold 2000: 112-3).

Emily begins by comparing the ease with which humans communicate with each other with the challenges of communicating with a tree. While she acknowledges that in some sense she has to “make it up,” she maintains that what she is making up occurs at the level of explanation; she is not denying the felt experience and sensations of relationship with the tree. In the last paragraph Emily explains that one must approach nature with the right perspective, not so much seeking a particular kind of experience, as being open to the possibilities of experience.

CONCLUSIONS

The experience of communicating with nature is a theme that emerged strongly during the transcript analysis. It seems that this theme is largely interdependent with the theme ‘connection’. It is the dialogic quality of this theme though that I felt delineates it as worthy of a separate identity.

As with ‘connection’ the experience of ‘communication’ is felt more than ‘thought’. The experience is felt strongly by the participants, although they find it difficult to explain. Indeed, the participants seem to find it difficult explaining the experience, because of the apparent paradoxes between what they experienced and conventional facts about communication with the non-human. The language that is available to explain the experience frequently refers to indigenous expertise: activist culture aligns itself with indigenous culture, in opposition to mainstream Australian culture. The participants achieve this by adopting a particular orientation towards nature and the development of ‘communication’ skills. This, in turn, creates a different moral relationship with non-human nature to the activists protagonists, including the whalers and loggers.

The value of the conceptual framework which guides these analyses will be reviewed in Chapter 13. However, the stories that have been presented in the these thematic chapters already suggest that the participants’

experiences of nature play a role in self-identity (trans)formation and action. More-than-human agency is proving its utility as an analytical concept to explore the relationship between nature and self-identity. Or, put differently, more-than-human agency is actualised in the relational field that exists between human actor and nature and animates the landscape. Abram, describing inter-subjectivity in Husserl's phenomenology, describes the empathic response of the sensing human to the subjects around them and the realisation that non-humans have forms of personhood. He writes "the field of appearances ... was now seen to be inhabited by multiple subjectivities; the phenomenal field was no longer the isolate haunt of a solitary ego, but a collective landscape, constituted by other experiencing subjects as well as by oneself" (1997: 37).

The activists have told stories about communication with nature that match Abram's assertion. The participant's experiences describe a nature that is not passive or homogenous. It is dynamic, heterogeneous, and some of the things there are perceived as become animate, non-human people. Emily reflected upon her identity as a forest activist:

Emily [in the forests] I start feeling identity. It opens up your world to seeing yourself not as a member of just society, but as a member of the entire planet, and you see your role in the world as in relationship to an entire eco system ... My identity as a person is not just me in the world as in a relationship to the job that you have, or the relationships that you have, or the sub-culture that you're a part of, or the clothes that you wear, or something like that. Here it's like your identity is something totally different, because you're a species out of all these species.

The activists seem to consciously seek to overcome nature-human separation and in the process of achieving connection a new kind of identity is being performed. In the following chapter stories are presented that indicate the strength of the connections that the participants form with nature.

Chapter 12 Grief

INTRODUCTION

Radical environmental activism is what happens when alternative, conventional strategies have failed. While this inquiry did not formally evaluate the ratio of successful to unsuccessful protest actions, forest activists had lost more actions than they had won. This means that the research participants had experienced the clear-felling of many contested coupes and tree-sits. In the case of the Sea Shepherd participants, the majority had returned from a successful campaign and had not witnessed any whale killings. They were lucky because most previous campaigns have involved witnessing whales being slaughtered.

All participants were asked about the experience of witnessing nature destroyed. Thirteen participants told stories about the grief they experienced upon the loss of the nature they were defending. The majority were forest activists and only two whaling activists reported witnessing whales being killed. These two had been on more than one campaign and had greater exposure to whaling than the other participants who had returned from the successful 2011-12 summer campaign.

That the forest activists reported a range of experiences that I have categorized under the theme 'grief' is not particularly surprising. It is a phenomenon that has already been documented. For example, Pete Hay describing in 2007 the experiences of those who fight against industrial logging in Tasmania writes that they:

spend our lives in a grey fog of grief. It is real grief, and unlike the grief experienced at the death of someone dear, it is never assuaged, because it goes on and remorselessly on. With every forest that is ripped apart the island is diminished beyond repair, unbearably

diminished in the sensibilities of those who love it for what it is – and its people are diminished too (Hay 2007: xviii).

The experience of losing nature, with which the person has developed a strong relationship, affects self-identity and commitment to activism. “Well, it's like someone's ripped your heart out of your chest,” Matilda said. It can also shape the type of action in which the person engages.

Mia gave a vivid account of what a clearfell looks like and its effect upon a person who has been trying to prevent such destruction:

Mia It's really devastating and, um, walking through clear-fell is a really energetically devastating experience. It's not just mentally, you know you feel like rationally this is just such a stupid way, such an idiotic waste of a resource, if you want to call it a resource and think of it as a resource in terms of like the way that these kinds of things are normally thought of.

Not only is that happening but fundamentally in terms of your human reactions to loss it's really, really awful. (John Yes). Because they are very dead places. They have been logged and burnt and so there's really (pause). They are like a post-apocalyptic places all the time and they are still smoking. There's silence because there's no bird sounds. There's no movement in amongst the piles of trees and plants and ferns and everything that's been destroyed. So that's a really unpleasant thing to have to experience and a lot of people don't experience it. And I guess in a sense it does spur one on in a sense. I guess, like, the kind of push that you get from seeing political corruption and going, 'this is so wrong'. (pause)

John So it's just so very wrong.

Mia Yeah. Definitely there is a definite energetic difference between walking a clear-fell all day and then you get out into a forest. You can feel. Well I can feel immediately how I feel about. Just energy wise. Being able to walk longer and further and feel more, stand taller (J Yes). It's like going into Mordor in Lord of the Rings. It just drags you down and it is so depressing. Energetically so dead, these places that are destroyed.

The stories given by participants illustrate the experience of grief, its effects, and the protective behaviours activists do or do not learn about future campaigning. I sought to understand the participants stories through the lens of the inquiry's analytical framework. My interpretation is concerned therefore with what the stories reveal about the participant's conceptualisation of nature and self-identity; its interest is in relationships. I realised, as I reflected upon my interviewing, that I paid less attention to feelings associated with grief, such as remorse or guilt, which was felt by the participants about their failure to prevent the destruction. I decided that the experience of grief is a manifestation of the strength of the relationships that the participants form with nature.

Sam was in a tree-sit when the Florentine blockade was broken by the Tasmanian Police.

John Can you take me through what that is like for you?

Sam Like seeing the Florentine get demolished?

John Yes.

Sam I guess I had a pretty close-up view, like I was in a tree-sit that was basically where the proposed road was. We headed sort of inward here and then just kind of keep going this way, near the Lungs of the Land and the Battery sit [both tree names].

John Yeah, I've been up there.

Sam They basically went around us, so I was here and they bulldozed here for about two weeks. So, yeah it was fucked. It was just one of those things that I found myself screaming "why" to the cops, you know. It was just like one of those things that is just an error. There's nothing right and it's everything wrong. It was just like being seen as wreckers, as a claw with a chainsaw inside them. That's like a machine gun. It just shouldn't exist, you know. It's like it has no purpose for human compassion or of thoughts or anything like that. It's only reason is to destroy.

I guess it's something that obviously creates trauma, because especially being up there by yourself, there's no way to (pause) I wrote a diary, but apart from

that there's not really any other way to process those thoughts. And also having to remain staunch and be prepared for the cops to come and get you. And having to out climb them or do what you have to do to stop them getting up your tree, because you don't want to get down, because then you're absolutely useless to this happening. And I guess also being in the tree-sits, like you're basically doing all you can with one person in the tree-sit at that point, but you're not doing enough. You're just watching them still. It makes you wonder what the point is.

John So it's a kind of impotent feeling?

Sam Yeah, totally. Feeling like all you can do is sit there. And it's weird that it keeps happening. You'd expect like this is something that happens basically apocalyptically, and it just keeps happening, and it will stop at night and then start again in the morning.

John Then it starts again, yes. I went to the blockade just after the bust and the kind of grief, and anger of course, but the overwhelming grief that was evident. There were people crying and it was just desperately sad for those people. I guess my question revolves around having witnessed that and experienced that, for some people I think can be too much and other people seem to find a way of maintaining their commitment. What's your approach to all of this?

Sam Well I think that it's certainly difficult and it certainly makes relating to others from that point difficult, knowing that other people go through traumatic things in their life. But specifically something that's related to trauma around destruction of nature is (pause). Because a lot of people just want to block that stuff a lot. They don't want to accept it, so they're not willing to talk about it. If you went to work after someone had just died, there would be some understanding, but to explain grief or just trying to have people accept grief based around nature being destroyed, often isn't even a point in bothering. So I think, after that, relating to other humans it gets a lot harder, because it just sort of polarises yourself.

Another part of that is not wanting to give up and I guess finding my anger from this experience has sort of been motivating, and then realising being motivated out of anger isn't necessarily the most positive thing. But I mean, I guess a sense of not wanting to give up after like experiencing so much shit from those people, from these institutions basically, you know. Viewing them

quite evidently as like an enemy against myself and others that I care about in the world. So I guess it prompted me to dig in in a way, but also directly after having just to step back and just chill out for quite a while.

John Just to look after yourself.

Sam Yeah. So I guess it was an immediate step back and then just wanting to dig in. But I think like it never stops, like eventually there is a time where you have to step back. I guess like, so I sort of had to move out of the bush half way through last year and get a job. And then I found myself just doing town actions a lot and ended up getting arrested a lot more than I would if I was doing bush stuff. I guess because I viewed basically white law and colonial law as what has done this to the bush, and they have no legitimacy and they don't count in my head. There's no relevant sort of values. I just disregarded the seriousness of all that, which ended up getting me real slammed by them because they don't like it when you don't take it seriously. You're not doing the crimes they're committing. So I suppose that's another repercussion, getting slammed.

It is clear from Sam's account of the Florentine being clear-felled that his conceptualisation of the value of the forest is starkly different to the loggers, but this also seems to reinforce his sense of the state legal system that supports the logging operations as illegitimate, despite the consequences of that for him. His description of watching the police intervention and logging operation is akin to a violent assault. What I find most interesting about his story, however, is his explanation of the difficulty non-activists had in understanding his grief. His feeling that this is not validated by non-activists seems to affect his attitudes towards them in a misanthropic direction, something that is also expressed elsewhere in his interview and which has implications for activist cultural delineation from mainstream communities. The experience of grief, and the collective recognition of its significance, supports the activists' cultural identity. Helen has a similar stance. She is glad that the Southern Ocean is so inhospitable because it makes it harder for humans to destroy it. She had reflected upon humanity's destructiveness and witnessing whales that were alive because of the Sea

Shepherd's presence. She commented that she felt when she was in the Southern Ocean that humans should not be there:

Helen It feels like we shouldn't be there.

John Other people have said this to me.

Helen Because it's so pristine and so, just it's magical and just the thought that if human beings were to take over some place like Antarctica, it would be destroyed, it would be ruined. So I'm very grateful that human beings are not capable of living there because it would be destroyed.

Sophie has previously described how she made a promise to defend the forest in the Weld and reflected upon how it cost her personally. The experience has also affected the way she thinks about her contemporary human society, reflecting also her sadness and anger about the damage humans are doing to their environment:

Sophie It's totally heartbreaking and also like I just don't see anybody changing, and like I guess that's not my relationship so much, but it does influence how I interact with the world that we live in, because the world that we live in as humans isn't a natural world at all it's just make up, believe, bullshit, fast world, quickly killing all the natural bits of the world, and is completely inhibiting our ability to interact with the nature that is left, and I probably know that if it keeps going the way that it's going will completely inhibit our ability to live here at all, it just won't be here anymore.

John Yeah, it's an incredibly negative, depressing kind of vision isn't it?

Sophie It's really horrible.

John So when you experience that kind of, what's the word? Betrayal or destruction. When you lose your friends such as the trees how do you deal with that?

Sophie Well I run away. That was my burnout. So after the Weld camp got busted, and I left and I went back to school, and did a – moved to Launceston for a year and did a certificate four in music, because I'm a musician, and then yeah I pretty much didn't participate in activism for about two years, and didn't really go to the bush at all. I didn't go back to the Weld nothing, yeah and so

- yeah in the last year and a half maybe I started doing stuff again - what was your original question?
- John Yes well in fact you're answering that. How did you deal with..?
- Sophie Okay how did I deal with..? I repressed it for sure.
- John Too painful?
- Sophie Yeah totally it's actual pain like I guess a lot of people would wonder how could I feel that or why we do the things that we do, and a lot of the time when I hear people talking about their future jobs and whatever, and talking about the fear that they have for their future, but I'm coming from exactly the same place, I'm coming from the actual fear of what the future is yeah...
- John Yes it seems sorry yes I was going to say it seems like people come to sort of bit of a crunch in how they look after themselves and care for other people who are feeling the same way that you are in terms of the choices they make and sort of move away from this space or return to it as you seem to have done, and survived it.
- Sophie Yeah I think just come around with activism. I've made sure that I didn't completely sacrifice everything about me to fight for the forest, I have made sure that I have time for my music now, I have a band and gig regularly, I'm building a house, I write and do things that are good for me, like walking in a bit of bush that's beautiful rather than trashed and like spend like every hour and every second of my time fighting for threatened forest. I think there's only so long people can do that for; some obviously a lot longer - but definitely there is a time limit on that.

Sophie told me the experience of losing her first coupe was devastating. She could not face further activism and moved to Launceston. The emotional cost of engaging in this kind of activism, in which she develops such a strong emotional connection is too high. But her desire to defend the forests remains strong. Fortunately she has learned protective behaviours to shield herself from future grief now that she has reengaged with environmental campaigning.

Burnout is a common consequence of the demands of direct action (of any kind). It appears easy to become consumed by a lifestyle that requires

complete commitment, within a very small social group, in which one's world is limited by the nature being contested. Participants reported that some activists did better than others at reconciling themselves to the loss of nature they were defending. For some, the experience was such that their only way to cope was by leaving the movement. Lucas told me he was very reluctant to reengage, and could only do so because he had "worked quite hard to disengage myself from opening up that much to forest that's most probably going to be logged."

Emily talked about the experience of losing a tree with which she had become strongly connected:

Ruby Yeah, well, I mean, that is definitely the defining moment in my life. I think that one tree - it's interesting because you do activism in the forest and you see a lot of forest go. You see - you go off and do an action and there's a forest there, you're seeing trees being cut down. Over the years I've seen a lot of trees get cut down, but nothing - there's just that one tree that's really impacted on me and I think it has changed me and in a way has changed my activism at that moment. I don't think - I feel a bit sad that I think it has changed my life, my ability to connect in the same way. I don't know if those experiences at the Floz of feeling so connected to the forest, if I'll ever have that again, because after having lost that tree I feel like it's actually difficult for me to connect. Even though I'm building that back up by this experience [being in a new tree-sit], which is actually really nice. But I still know, even though I feel connected in some ways to this forest, it's not the way it was in the Floz. It's not as (pause) the connection isn't as deep and I just think I'll never have it again. I think it has changed me a lot.

John Is that a protective measure, or is it that you've just changed?

Ruby I think it's a protective measure. Well, I don't know. I guess it's like - yeah, I guess at the beginning, being in the Florentine and I was saying before I really wanted to connect with it. I felt like that was a part of activism. It was like not just being there, but knowing the forest was a part of it and I wanted to know it really well. I wanted to know what was great about it so I could express that to other people and make them love it. There was this sense that I needed to

connect to the forest to be a good activist and now I just think for self-sustainability, if I'm going to keep doing this for however long, to connect in that level - it really feels - I know you're asking me questions about what does connection mean, and it just feels impossible almost to explain it. But I really did have such a strong connection to that place and then to lose it was so hard. I don't think that you could (pause) I just feel like I don't know how you could do that over and over again, knowing that you're going to lose it every time. Or maybe you're not, but I think, I don't know, it's tricky when you think that you're going to save it.

I think that's what made that a lot harder. I've reflected on it, because I thought that coming up into this tree might be hard and also the initial purpose of the tree-sit was to, which didn't end up happening so much, but to basically, it's not a blockade, it's just to film them logging. So, I'm not stopping them from working and my plan was that they would log the trees and I'd just film it. So, I came up here with that in mind. I didn't want to connect to it.

The story she tells is, I think, one of maturation. She must learn the personal skills necessary to survive as an activist, but there is a cost and like Lucas that is the feelings of connection that she has previously enjoyed.

Pete became very animated when told me that it is important that fellow activists visit protected areas to overcome grief and to prevent burnout:

Pete I worry a bit about her though because I think she's very consumed by what she's doing and it's only really going to lead to heartbreak, I don't think she's going to win. They're going to log that coop eventually. But she's a pretty hard woman. She's another one who doesn't get out enough. She lived at Camp Florentine for a couple of years. It's amazing what she's done, she's done so much incredible stuff. I took her up to Mount Field National Park one day, she'd never even been up there. She'd been driving past it for years and it's like "[name], got to get you into protected areas more often". She develops these connections with areas that just get trashed and then she gets heartbroken and I've always been a real advocate of accepting the losses and

the tragedy and the loss of the place and landscapes that you develop strong connections to, accepting that and grieving for them and dealing with it but then celebrating the other places.

John Yes and anchoring yourself there.

Pete Yeah and knowing that they're there is really, really important. We took [name] up to Mount Field and she was just like "Oh my god, this is amazing, this is awesome" and I took her for a walk up in Kakadu as well, a week long walk up there. I was up there and I made her come up and she just loved it, she was like "Wow, I could stay here forever. This is kind of the best place to be in the world. This is amazing". Everything about her changed. She was like really relaxed and she kept saying "It's so good to know that these places are here" because so many people like her, they just fill their worlds with grief about the landscapes that they've become connected to and then they see them getting trashed.

He also told me about his reaction to the Florentine being logged:

Pete Yeah, well when the Florentine was getting busted and logged in January 2009 and then again in May; definitely though when they were doing that initial roading [the access road from the bitumen through the forest corridor into the coupe]. There was that day when we had a big rally and there was lots of people that came out and people just spontaneously circled the bulldozers, just holding hands and that was a really full on moment because we'd been running around the bush late at night, setting up tree-sits and cables to structures and doing everything stealth. It was just a few of us, it was ridiculous really and it was a really overwhelming feeling when all these people just came out and held hands and we were all just sitting back going "Fuck, this is incredible" but it was really, really full on because it was in that area that that took place that I started to and a mate of mine started to realise what that area looked like and that we used to camp in that area and now it was just this big muddy shit hole with a few fat bulldozer drivers.

Both of us just started to cry, both of us were just like, yeah, we just started crying and not because we were happy about the (pause) Well yeah, we were, we were stoked that all these people had come out and stopped the work. But just because we remembered what the place looked like and we knew all the intricacies and the details. There's an orchid that pops up over here every

November and there's this little sassafras seedling that's putting its roots down through this fern tree and there's this big hanging moss thing here, all that sort of thing and then there's the fern tree that twists and turns and you know all the other little intricacies and then to have it just reduced to a big mud (unclear) like a log landing, yeah it's pretty heartbreaking.

Such experiences can also strengthen determination to continue campaigning. Oliver told me about watching a whale being killed while he was in a helicopter. Much as with Sam's experience of watching nature destroyed from a tree-sit, Oliver expressed impotence at not being in a position to prevent the whale being killed. He said he felt responsible for allowing it and that this strengthened his determination to protect other whales.

Charlotte had been talking about the feeling of herself being entwined with the forest. I had asked her about that experience and how she knew she was entwined with her tree.

John How do you know that it's intertwined? ... Are there any things that have happened that have given you this realisation?

Charlotte I guess when it goes I feel lost.

John So when your tree was chopped down for example.

Charlotte I guess watching the guardian trees in the front be all cut down, definitely feeling the loss. Or even seeing road kill, I guess if it wasn't intertwined, I wouldn't feel that because I'd be disconnected from it.

John So you have this incredibly strong connection. One of my later questions was going to be to learn what it's like when you see one of these trees that you've got to know so well chopped down, and I can imagine it's very a painful experience.

Charlotte Yeah.

John Does that reinforce your determination?

Charlotte Yeah, I think it makes me even more determined to stay in the fight, which is interesting because the police and forestry's tactics use that to demoralise

people, but I found with me it makes me more determined, a bit more reckless maybe, but more determined.

Will has integrated his response to forest destruction into a broader worldview in which he is engaged in the world's immune response to anthropogenic destruction of biodiversity. He theorises his place in a self-regulating Gaia-like nature.

John You described yourself as one of nature's antibodies. Do you want to speak about that a bit because that was really interesting?

Will It comes from John Seed again talking about how direct action activists are actually part of the rainforest defending itself and also I had this moment with Starhawk in the Weld Valley, in 2002, 2003. I stood on the Glovers Bluff, I was almost in tears because I was saying all this forest in front of me is slated for logging and I'm doing all I can but we are going to lose it and she said to me, wild nature across the world is being attacked and we are losing these places and these places call to people for help and there are some of us that hear it, some of the lucky ones and I guess in that sense I feel like, somewhere deep down I've heard. It's like that Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, hearing the sound of the earth crying. I heard it, very early on and Deep Ecology and my connection with nature, and some of Starhawk's stuff at a later date has helped me interpret that cry and now it helps me be that antibody.

I look around and there's handfuls of people that really understand what we are losing. We are losing around 120 species a day, 50,000 species a year, the backbone of diversity is collapsing. We are experiencing the largest mass extinction event on record. Beyond all that is in any fossil records and it's not front page news, it's not even page two or three. But there are people who acknowledge and who see that's happening and I guess I've ended up as one of them.

Ruby talked about how the knowledge of the seriousness of their enterprise, and the consequences of whaling for individual whales, sometimes inhibited her colleagues and her self doing fun things because it felt wrong to enjoy themselves when they were hunting a whaling fleet that was killing whales.

Although coming across the remains of a whale was sad, the discovery meant that they were close to the whaling fleet.

Ruby You know you kind of feel guilty like sometimes, like, having fun and playing games. Even though you can't help it because you haven't found the fleet yet. For example the day we first saw whale bits floating in the water, it was very bitter sweet because you wanted to celebrate that we were on the trail, but then you also wanted to acknowledge that a whale had to die for that. But a really beautiful thing for us was that we knew that by the time we found the fleet that that whale, it's remnants we saw, was the last whale to die. So that was a really awesome feeling, of. If it's going to get cut up into bits and thrown back into the water, it was kind of like the message from beyond the grave, it led us to the bad guys. It was very bitter sweet.

CONCLUSIONS

Grief at the loss of nature is a significant element of the activist experience. It can affect the activist's ongoing participation in activism, and might deter them from future engagement in direct action activism. Participants seem to develop strategies to protect them from emotional harm resulting from failed campaigns. One strategy or consequence is a circumspectness about the emotional engagement they make with the nature they are defending. This negatively affects their sense of connection to nature.

I interpret the experiences reported under this theme as a manifestation of the strength of the participants' relationships and attachment they develop with the nature they are defending. This was particularly apparent with the forest activists of course, whose experiences of losing nature were more complete and frequent than the whaling participants.

In many respects the grief experience is an intersection of the three analytical poles of this inquiry. Participants' stories of losing nature reveal how they conceptualise nature, as having inherent value and rights to flourish (rather than be destroyed for timber), and in many cases by giving

individuals such as trees a similar status to human friends. It is clear also that the participants invest a huge amount of themselves in their campaign. Their world is, for extended periods at least, bound up in the place they are defending from harm. This seems to impact their self-identity, an identity that is made vulnerable, because it depends, for inexperienced activists at least, upon a successful outcome to their campaign. The malleable nature of self-identity is also apparent in the ways that participants respond to the loss of nature; participants are forced to examine their purpose, role and level of future investment in direct action activism.

Chapter 13 Alive to the world

To be sentient ... is to open up to a world, to yield to its embrace, and to resonate in one's inner being to its illuminations and reverberations. Bathed in light, submerged in sound and rapt in feeling, the sentient body, at once both perceiver and producer, traces the paths of the world's becoming in the very course of contributing to its ongoing renewal.

Tim Ingold 2011: 12

This thesis has been about the relationship between radical environmental activists and the nature they defend. It has investigated whether, for forest and whaling activists, nature is experienced as an active participant in the construction and shaping of their identity and activism. The inquiry's research questions asked:

- what are radical environmental activists' perspectives and lived experiences of nature; and
- what identity and meaning-making processes are involved in the relational dynamics between these activists and the nature they are defending?

The research participants' narratives, presented in the preceding chapters, reveal that they have meaningful interactions with nature, which affect their self-identity and activism. They describe experiences in which nature is perceived as dynamic and interactive, not a passive tableau. Many of them consciously seek to deepen their relationships with nature, which has become a fundamental part of their self-identity.

In this chapter I review the inquiry's findings and consider the relationship between the lived experience of defending nature, and the compulsion and moral obligation that the participants possess. I conclude with a review of the research questions and the research journey.

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF DEFENDING NATURE

As a researcher I have tried to maintain a fidelity to my phenomenological methodology and explicate the participants' telling, bracketing my own experiences, theories and suppositions. But I have also adopted a hermeneutic methodology that recognises all (re)telling is, to some extent, interpretive (van Manen 1990: 24-7) and will be interpreted further by the researcher. These methodologies establish what I think is an ultimately creative tension between describing the essential structures of the participants' experiences, and analysing the participant's interpretation, or meaning making, from a more sociological perspective. I have tried to address this tension by giving precedence to the participants' voices, reproducing largely unedited transcripts of their stories, which evoke the particular theme, along with interpretations that seek to understand the meaning making relationships between the participant, the experience and activist culture.

The first of the five thematic chapters interpreted accounts of the participants' journeys into activism. While each participants' narrative was unique, patterns emerged. Chief among them is a pivotal or epiphanic experience of nature that propelled them along their journey. The participants report an encounter with nature that motivates (or compels) them to engage in radical activism. In the case of the Sea Shepherd participants this is an encounter with an animal that gives rise to an animal rights stance, which recognizes the 'personhood' of animals and their rights to flourish without human interference. With respect to forest participants, the pivotal moment typically occurs when confronted by old growth forest and its destruction. Their reaction at such destruction and determination to do something about it, Hay's (2002: 2) 'green trigger', is also informed by a rights perspective, although in this case it begins with the rights of an ecosystem, rather than those (the same) of an animal. Something else also seems to contribute to the forest activists' decision to engage in radical

environmentalism. They experience nature in a way that is new; it is an experience that reconfigures their sense of who they are and their place in the world. Through this experience nature takes on a far greater significance than it had previously.

Most participants developed the motivation to become activists in the presence of other activists. I recognise that being in community with other activists is a significant element of activist experience. My findings do not suggest an alternative explanation for radical environmentalism to the established canon of social movement literature. They enhance understanding, by focussing upon the contribution of and entanglement with nature.

Four key themes emerged as central to the experience of defending nature. The first three, the transcendent power of nature, connection, and communication, were experienced during the establishment and deepening of nature-human relationships. The fourth, grief, was experienced as a consequence of the loss of the nature being defended. I will briefly review each theme before discussing the implications of these findings.

Having experiences such as those that I have called the transcendent power of nature are not restricted to radical environmentalists. They are an established aspect of human experience and not everyone who has such an experience becomes a radical environmentalist. However, for the research participants the experience is fundamental to their conceptualization of, and relationship with, nature and their motivation to become activists. Some of the activists report their environmental commitment as a considered, rational decision. However, for the majority, the compulsion to defend nature is pre-rational (see Hay 2002: 2-4); it is a life-changing, epiphanic response to experience.

A stream flowing throughout this thesis is the paradox inherent in the modern human's condition as part of and separate from nature. The material and cultural conditions of our contemporary, largely urbanized lives, insulate us from the experience of what is perceived as untrammelled nature. To find oneself immersed in wild nature, among an old-growth forest, or amid the vastness of the Southern Ocean, and notwithstanding that some material and cultural insulation accompanies us, is to expose oneself to a world and intensity of experience, of which we were previously unaware. In this sense our separation from nature creates the possibilities of transcendent experiences. And it is the transcendent experience that, I think, creates the compulsion to overcome separation.

How is this accomplished? I think the two themes of connection and communication point the way. Connection to nature can feel like a relationship with another human being: nature is experienced as peopled by non-human subjects, rather than passive objects. Essential to the experience is the sensation that nature is responding, in some way, to the participant's being there. It is interactional. Connection is not a fixed state; it can deepen over time. The state of connection may be eroded or lost if the person moves away, and it can be regained upon their return. Achieving connection is also a skilled process. The participants' stories suggest it requires a particular attitude, or orientation, awareness and perception of the participant's environment (compare with Plumwood, 2002: 194).

Communication shares much in common with connection to nature, but is distinguished by the experience of dialogue. Most participants reported the experience of some kind of dialogic communication with the nature they were defending. Sometimes communication seems to emanate from an animal or plant, but there are also times when the participant feels as if the landscape is communicating with, or signalling, them. Nature is experienced as sentient, animate and heterogeneous. Relationships form

and deepen. Radical activist culture seems to explain the possibility of connection and communication by referring to indigenous cultures as possessing the requisite knowledge and skills. This is an aspect of nature-human experiences that surely warrants further research.

The final theme that I have described is grief. I understand grief as an indication of the depth of the moral relationship that the participant forms with the nature they are defending, as well as the symbolic value that it holds for them: their self-identity has become bound up with the contested nature. Losing nature gives rise to intense grief, described as akin to the loss of a human friend or relative. Grief is an essential aspect of the activist's experience and they may develop skills and attitudes to deal with grief, or retire from direct action campaigning. One consequence of grief is that, as a protective measure, the activist may become reluctant or nervous about connecting as strongly to nature in the future.

The research participants seem to be actively engaged in overcoming separation from nature through the formation of relationships. The biophilia hypothesis argues that humans have evolved to affiliate with life and lifelike processes (Kellert 1993: 21). Similarly, Abram argues that humans have a "yearning for engagement with a more-than-human otherness" (Abram 2010: 277). I have no doubt that humans, who in evolutionary terms are a relatively young species, have evolved biologically to seek relationships wherever we find them, whether it is with other humans, with computers, books or other artefacts, or with the more-than-human world. Humans are relational; our faculties of perception are constantly engaged in recognizing and evaluating relations. In the unfolding of our encounters with the world we seek and form relationships with things. We bring, of course, our imaginations and the symbolic languages peculiar to our cultures. But those things that our perception is directed towards push back: they collaborate to reconstitute our self-identity and the

meanings we make about our place in the world. Separation from nature is overcome through an orientation and way of being in the world. This is what the chapter title suggests: the participants are alive to the world, as it is to them.

INTERCONNECTION, KINSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY

This entanglement of the human and their lifeworld gives rise to a strongly moral foundation to the participants' identities and actions. I wonder what is the relationship between their being in nature and the extent of their compulsion to defend nature. This inquiry cannot answer this completely, but I think it can point the way. Reflecting upon this question, I have made three related findings. The first is the changes that are wrought upon the participants during the *time* that they have spent in the nature they are defending. The second is the *skills* that the participants develop as they live in wild nature. The third is the *animist* perception of nature that many participants express.

Having made the decision to join a direct action campaign the participants spend significant periods of time in the forests or southern ocean. Living in nature with fewer of the material and other trappings of urban life simplifies the participants' daily lives. This is most pronounced for the forest activists who are camping (recall whaling activist Oliver's frustration at the way being on a vessel separated him from nature). They have much time to devote to being in nature, observing its routines, learning the skills to perceive more of its complexity and processes, and developing the feeling they are becoming participants in forest life. They have experiences of connection and communication with the nature in which they are immersed, to the extent that they experience the state of **interconnection**. This is an experience that is highly relational and which has reciprocal and dialogic qualities. The participants change from witnesses of the nature they are amid, to participants in its dramatic unfolding as, "our most immediate

perceptual experience discloses a world in continual metamorphosis” (Abram 2010: 296). The participants have reported that their experiences can change and deepen with time. The participants achieve this through the development of skills, which better equip them to live among and perceive (and enjoy) nature, and a vocabulary that they learn to make meaning of their experiences. This skill set is often likened to what is regarded by the participants as the more highly developed skills and vocabularies that indigenous peoples are thought to have about their relationship with nature.

The nature the participants are defending takes on a fresh ontological character. It becomes animate. The modern, scientific perception and categorization of the world into living and non-living things is less useful to the human intimately entangled with, and actively participating in, an unfolding nature. I am not rejecting science, and nor are the participants, who actively pursue scientific research about the ecosystems they are defending. Rather, I am suggesting that the stories about the lived experience of defending nature suggest to me that the participants gain an animist world view (see also Ingold 2011). This, I think, is what Abram (2010) means by becoming fully animal and fully human.

Living in an animate nature contributes to a radical activist culture and conceptualisation of nature that is different from the participants’ mainstream society. This is a sub-culture that is generated experientially in the sense that an understanding of the culture’s precepts cannot be arrived at theoretically. This is one reason, I think, why radical environmentalists’ passionate claims are met with such lack of comprehension by their protagonists and the public; it is outside their experience.

A further outcome of the animist stance is that the participants form **kinship** or family relationships with the nature they are defending (recall the participants’ reflections on losing the trees that supported their tree-

sits). The recognition that we are human and animal, participants in an animate nature comprising communities of other sentient things, permits an affiliation with non-humans that extends to them (or perhaps reveals) personhood. It is no surprise, therefore, that one of the experiences that the participants report is forms of communication with non-humans.

The consequence of interconnection, communication and kinship relationships with nature is the development of moral obligation towards not just the whale or the tree, but more-than-human nature generally. The participants feel a personal **responsibility** to defend a nature that is not able to defend itself from chainsaws or harpoons. In some instances their identification with the nature is such that they feel they have no choice but to defend it.

How to theorize further the encounter with the more-than-human other that gives rise to such obligation, must be the subject of another research exercise. I have previously referred to Buber's (1979) account of the *I* and *Thou* relationship and the responsibility to the other that this implies. Levinas (1998) argues that through the encounter with the other, one is inspired to feel an infinite ethical obligation towards them. Unlike Buber, Levinas did not extend his account of ethical relations to the non-human, although Davy (2003a and 2003b) argues this is possible when humans experience the non-human other as a person. Both Buber and Levinas develop different ethical frameworks in which the confrontation with the other establishes self-awareness and ethical obligation to the other. I think it is the recognition of, and identification with, the other's 'personhood', for want of a better word (and whether this is or is not anthropomorphism on the part of the participant is not central to their action in the world), that creates the basis of a commitment to defend nature.

NATURE, SELF-IDENTITY AND ACTION

I have employed three concepts that provide the analytical lens for this investigation into nature-activist relationships. The narratives provided by the research participants reveal personal journeys that affect the ways they conceptualise nature, their self-identity and their role in the world. I think they tell stories about personal and social change that emerge from the human-centred, or anthropocentric, conceptualization of nature that is characteristic of Australian society. Their experiences lead to a reconceptualization along a continuum from this starting point towards a nature-human relationship in which more-than-human nature is recognised as having the same rights as humans to flourish without interference by humans. In other words, their conceptualisation of nature is moving in a biocentric direction through their experiences and interactions with other activists.

The participants' narratives also reveal changes in their social beliefs and actions as their conceptualisation changes; a changed belief about the nature-human relationship encourages changed behaviour. In other words, how one conceptualizes and feels about the world affects how one acts towards it. If this is accepted, it becomes possible to model the relationships between conceptualisation and social action that arises through experiences of nature, in light of the inquiry's conceptual framework (Figure 13.1). The change in environmental identification (and conceptualization of nature) in a biocentric direction gives rise to altered beliefs about humanity's place in nature, the agency of the more-than-human world and self-identity. These, in turn, affect the person's action, described in terms of their orientation towards nature and the outcomes of their action. Such a figure inevitably simplifies things. I have plotted three ways of conceptualizing nature, but it is, perhaps more useful to think about a continuum between anthropocentric and biocentric worldviews.

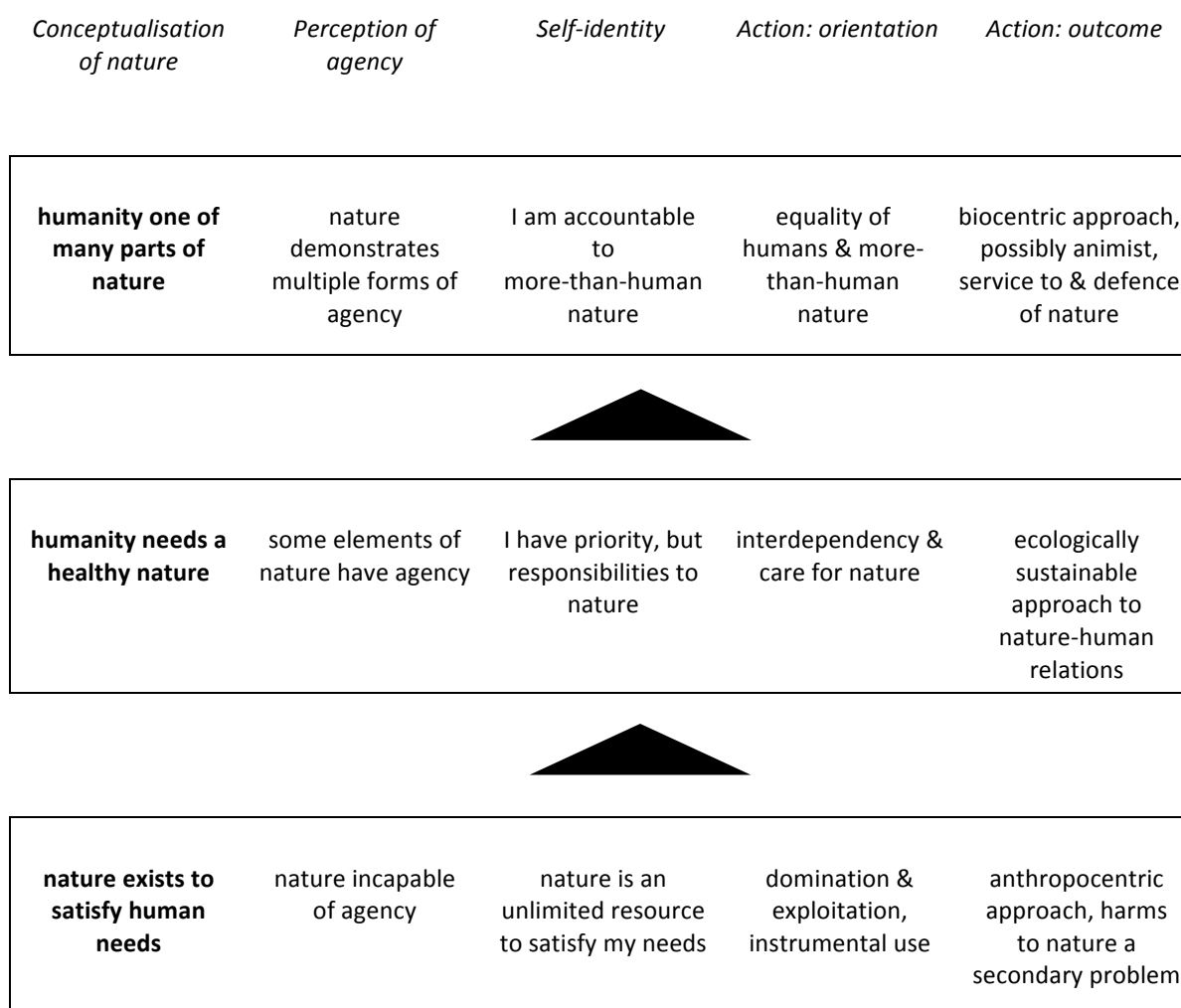


Figure 13.1 Transformation of activist concepts and actions over time

This model suggests an evolution towards biocentrism. However, it is not meant to suggest that all participants move in the same way at the same speed. As the interview data suggests, some participants have epiphanic experiences that radically alter their conceptualization of nature. Further, I do not mean to suggest that they move in one direction only, or that all radical activists achieve a purely biocentric conceptualisation of nature. It is more likely that people move backwards and forwards along the continuum.

Perhaps the dynamic qualities of the participants' biographies are better imagined as a spiral, rather than a linear pathway. Movement along the pathway is a journey that involves toing and froing, as most journeys do, in

which steady or stable states are punctuated by experiences that indicate the achievement of new skill levels, or new forms of realisation about nature and their roles as humans and activists. The themes that emerged from the interviews are essential elements of this journey. The journey is shared: it is a social phenomenon, and the interviews demonstrate the development of distinctive activist cultures that support movement along the spiral.

Movement along this continuum does not mean a rejection of scientific ways of understanding the world. Many participants rejected notions that they were 'hippies' and it is clear that they are able to validate both scientific explanations of nature (especially the ecological and climate change sciences) and their experientially derived explanations of the nature they were defending. What I think they do is draw upon resources that are useful to them as they participate in and navigate their worlds.

In this respect the participants are quite different from modernity's first environmentalists, the romantics of the nineteenth century, who reacted against the social and physical changes to Enlightenment Europe and North America as a consequence of the pursuit of scientific rationalism and philosophies that placed humans above nature (see Hay 2002: 4-11). The participants, while they often make reference to indigenous skills and ways of knowing about nature, do not hark back to, or campaign for, a simpler, non-urban and deindustrialised society. They are looking towards the future and employing science and modern technologies such as the internet to defend a nature that they believe will be safe when society catches up with them.

LOOKING BACK

This chapter has focussed on addressing the inquiry's research questions. The purpose of this section is to reflect upon the research journey itself. The inquiry was launched with the proposition that nature is an active

participant in activist experience. The findings that I have reported confirm this proposition. There are dangers, however, in setting out to prove something the researcher already 'believes' and I have taken care to avoid doing this. As social researcher I have maintained a commitment to developing and implementing a logical and coherent research approach and analysis (notwithstanding the validity threats that arise in narrative research; Polkinghorne 2007).

Indeed this inquiry has challenged my original presuppositions about nature-activist relationships and I frequently realised that I had changed my mind and/or learned how to see something from a different perspective. In particular, my engagement with the literatures about nature and more-than-human agency challenged me to think with far greater sophistication about the participants' being in their environment. In a sense two thinkers bookended my research journey. I discovered David Abram (1997) early on in the inquiry. He gave me both the intellectual trails to follow as I enquired into phenomenology and more-than-human agency. He also reminded me that serious research can, or should, have a playful aspect. At the end of this inquiry I came across a series of essays by Tim Ingold (2011) which helped me extend my thinking about the research findings, particularly with respect to animism and the emergent nature of human experience. An exciting aspect of the research journey was the relationship between interviewing and interpretation. The narrative interview proved a valuable way of assisting the research participants describe how they make meaning of their worlds. The interview experience itself taught me about the ethical issues that arise through this kind of social research. It also afforded me the privilege of learning about a world I would not otherwise have gained entry. In this respect this inquiry makes a genuine and original contribution to environmental sociology.

LOOKING FORWARDS

The narratives told by twenty two extraordinary individuals about their experiences, have contributed to the study of human–nature relationships, by revealing nature as an active contributor to activist self-identity and culture. There remains much to learn. I am particularly interested in how the findings of this inquiry could be applied to reconfiguring Western conceptualizations of nature in a way that minimizes the harms that are arising from climate change and other human impacts upon the more-than-human world. One area that deserves further exploration is the skills and vocabularies that people might learn to develop different, and arguably more enriching, relationships with nature. This is not a manifesto for radical environmentalism, rather it is a recognition that the kinds of experiences reported by the research participants are available to other people. Such experiences and reconfigurations of ‘nature’ will hopefully assist societies to design urban and other living arrangements that are more conducive to sustainable relationships with the more-than-human world.

This inquiry was introduced by arguing that sociology has struggled to deal with environment. Sociology must, if it is to remain relevant when societies are ultimately forced to reconsider their relationship with nature, acknowledge the role of nature as an active participant in the construction and shaping of human lives and cultures. It must recognise that nature and humans are inextricably entangled, physically and semantically. What happens to nature is a social problem, but society is also a problem for nature. The development of social theories and perspectives that encourage a reconciliation between nature and humans could not be more important.

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